

Polly.ooly

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Polly.ooly'.

Librarian

Trishna Public Library

POLLYOOLY CHANGES HER ADDRESS 31

away the dirty plate, when the Honourable John Ruffin said gravely, "A noble type of English womanhood, one Mrs Meeken, has informed me that you have been deceiving me, Pollyooly."

Pollyooly gasped and flushed and stood still, and stared at him with frightened eyes, plucking nervously at her frock.

"I will not disguise from you that your conduct has saddened me," he said in a mournful tone, breaking the top of one of the eggs. "It is on a par with the way in which your agreeable sex has always treated me. It is a sad blow—a bitter blow, indeed. Yet I should have known that your transcendent power of grilling bacon was incompatible with the sterner virtues."

"I wouldn't have done it, not to you, sir, if it had only been me. But there was the Lump. And I knew that you wouldn't think that I could do for you as well as a grown-up laundress," said Pollyooly in a trembling voice; and she wrung her hands.

"The modesty of great minds. I might have expected it. And yet I have assured you again and again that your method of grilling bacon shows undoubted genius," said the Honourable John Ruffin, sententiously; and then his kindly grey eyes grew keen as he added, "But how does your brother Roger, a child of even tenderer years than your own, come to be a well-spring of deceit?"

stared at him with amazed eyes, as if she could not believe her ears, which was, indeed, the case.

"Of course, I'm keeping you on," said the Honourable John Ruffin, in some surprise. "Your transcendent power of grilling bacon has touched my heart. Besides, for generations my family have been patrons of genius."

In her relief, Pollyooly gave a great gasp, and then she burst out crying. The Honourable John Ruffin looked at her with an expression of extreme discomfort for a minute or two; then he rose, patted her gently on the shoulder, and begged her to stop.

Tears were really foreign to Pollyooly's strenuous nature, and they soon ceased. The Honourable John Ruffin resumed his seat with an air of considerable relief.

He went on with his breakfast, till she grew quite calm. Then he said, "Well, 75 The King's Bench Walk is a very good address—it is my own. If you and your brother, who, as I gather from his name, is a boy of pacific tendencies, were to remove your furniture to the garret above this room, and take up your abodes there, you would be supplied with that indispensable requirement to a successful modern career. Moreover, I have long felt that it is wrong, in the present congested condition of housing in Central London, to keep that garret empty. It is an airy room, but a good

POLLYOOLY CHANGES HER ADDRESS 35

oil stove in the winter would make it quite habitable for the young and hardy."

"But the rent, sir . . . a room like that," gasped Pollyooly.

"Yes, I could not charge you less than a shilling a week rent owing to the economic law of supply and demand. Intrinsically it cannot be worth sixpence. Yet, who am I to fly in the face of Political Economy? But as I have for some time intended to raise your salary, as a mark of my appreciation of your skill in grilling bacon, to six shillings a week, you will be able to pay a shilling a week and still save three shillings. So that puts the matter on a purely business footing. There is no obligation on either side."

"Oh, sir," said Pollyooly, breathlessly.

"You had better have your furniture brought in as soon as possible; and, as is the custom of intelligent London landlords, I will pay the cost of its removal."

"Oh, thank you, sir," said Pollyooly; and her eyes shone on his with a devouring gratitude.

"Not a word, not a word," said the Honourable John Ruffin, with a graceful wave of his hand.

"Business is business. I have no doubt that with this good address you will soon get another post as laundress, and double your income."

For a while Pollyooly did not know whether she stood on her head or her heels so great were her joy

and relief at the passing of the black cloud, which had lowered over their fortunes. Her fingers, usually so deft, fumbled the crockery, and she nearly let a plate fall. Her nimble feet stumbled twice on the stairs. There was a fine flush on her cheeks; and her eyes shone all the while.

When she had finished her morning's work she hurried to Mrs Brown with the joyful news. Mrs Brown was delighted by Pollyooly's good fortune, and then she was saddened by the thought that she would enjoy less of the society of the Lump, who had been wont to spend with her the hours during which Pollyooly worked. Pollyooly comforted her by telling her that she would bring the Lump to visit her as often as she liked. Then Mrs Brown said that she had always expected it, that all was well that ended well, and that heaven helped those that helped themselves.

Then Pollyooly sought out the father of Henry Wiggins, who earned a somewhat precarious livelihood by doing odd jobs about the Temple, and after some stern bartering arranged with him to transfer her belongings from the attic in Alsatia to the attic in the King's Bench Walk for the sum of three shillings.

Then she betook herself to that attic, taking the Lump with her, and set about scrubbing and cleaning it with joyous vigour. Now and again

POLLYOOLY CHANGES HER ADDRESS 37

she had to stop to hug the Lump and tell him yet once more the story of their good fortune.

By four o'clock she had finished cleaning it. The walls must have been white-washed within the last two or three months, because after she had brushed them they were rather white. Then Mr Wiggins in three journeys carried her heavier belongings up to the attic and she carried the smaller ones. At half-past five she and the Lump took their tea in one of the cleanest attics in Central London.

The Honourable John Ruffin learned that Pollyooly and the Lump had taken up their quarters in their new home by hearing them moving about overhead on his first awakening. He turned over and went to sleep again peacefully, quite untroubled by any doubts about the results of his philanthropy.

When Pollyooly brought him his bacon, he said, "So you have established yourselves in your new quarters, Pollyooly?"

"Yes, sir. Thank you, sir," said Pollyooly; and her eyes shone on him gratefully.

He gazed at her with a considerable pleasure, for he was not one of those on whose æsthetic sensibilities the possession of an angel child as Temple Laundress could pall.

Then he said, "On consideration, Pollyooly, I have come to the conclusion that now that you

have become my resident housekeeper, you can no longer be truly reckoned a Temple Laundress."

"No, sir," said Pollyooly.

The Honourable John Ruffin surveyed her gravely for a minute; then he 'went on,' "Moreover, I do not think that the name 'Pollyooly' is quite the name for the housekeeper of a gentleman of—of—shall we say, rank and fashion. It is a position of dignity."

"Yes, sir," said Pollyooly, gravely.

"And naturally the holder of a position of dignity should have a dignified name."

"Yes, sir," said Pollyooly.

"Therefore I shall call you 'Mrs Hooley,'" said the Honourable John Ruffin.

"Yes, sir," said Pollyooly. "But my name isn't 'Hooley,' sir. It's Bride—like Aunt Hannah's; and my other name's 'Mary.'"

"The deuce it is!" said the Honourable John Ruffin, in no little surprise. "I'd made up my mind that it was Hooley—pronounced 'ooley' in the metropolitan fashion."

"No, sir. They always called me Pollyooly instead of plain Polly," said Pollyooly, in a somewhat apologetic tone.

"Ah, I see; the 'ooly' is a diminutive affix expressive of affection," said the Honourable John Ruffin, with an air of enlightenment.

"Yes, sir," said Pollyooly, politely, though she

POLLYOOLY CHANGES HER ADDRESS 39

knew neither what a diminutive nor an affix was. .

"Mary Bride—Mary Bride," said the Honourable John Ruffin, in a tone of thoughtful approval. "It's an incredibly appropriate name for an angel child. Well, I shall call you 'Mrs Bride.' "

"Aren't I rather young to be called 'Mrs,' sir?" said Pollyooly, in a doubtful tone. .

"Undoubtedly. But housekeepers are always 'Mrs' in the best families. We must follow the custom and ignore your youth," said the Honourable John Ruffin, firmly. .

"Yes, sir," said Pollyooly.

The Honourable John Ruffin surveyed her once more; then he said in a somewhat rueful tone, "I feel that something ought to be done in the matter of your dress. But, alas! the exchequer (not the public Exchequer, of which I intend to be one day Chancellor), but my own private exchequer is empty."

Pollyooly looked down at her oft-washed blue print frock, which had grown uncommonly short in the skirt, and a faint flush mantled her cheeks.

"Mrs Brown is going to make me a new frock, sir, when I get the stuff," she said. .

"I must get the stuff—as soon as something in the nature of a ship comes home," said the Honourable John Ruffin. "My mother used to give all the maids what, I believe, are called 'dress-lengths' "

every Christmas; and we must not let the fact that Christmas has stolen several months' march on us cause any breach of a time-honoured custom. Only the time is not yet."

"Thank you, sir," said Pollyooly. "And in the afternoon, sir, when I have done my work and you have visitors, I can wear my new black frock, the one that came out of the burial-money."

"Good," said the Honourable John Ruffin. "That will tide us over the present crisis."

He found no reason to regret that he had established Pollyooly and the Lump in his attic. He had been right in supposing that the Lump had gained his name from the enjoyment of a pacific nature. He never heard his voice raised in a wail or a whimper. Indeed, he seemed a noiseless child. It also pleased the Honourable John Ruffin greatly that he should be an authentic, but red-haired, cherub, the perfect match of his angel sister. The Honourable John Ruffin had a very strong sense of the fitness of things, and he would not for the world have had it ruffled.

Pollyooly was considerably surprised by his making, or rather trying to make, a change in his diet. At least once a week he would order in a cold roast chicken or a tongue from Messrs Spiers & Pond, with whom, for some quite inexplicable reason, his credit was good, and eat a scrap of it after his eggs at breakfast.

POLLYOOLY CHANGES HER ADDRESS 41

Always he said, as he laid down his knife and fork, "it is no use, Pollyooly. In vain I try to train myself to become a fine old English gentleman, one of the olden time. I cannot bring myself to devour these solid meats at breakfast. Do not let my appetite be weakened by the sight of this severe dish again. Take it away, and eat it up at the hours to which it is appropriate."

Pollyooly always thanked him gratefully. She needed to spend no money at all on solid foods, only on the Lump's milk. She found herself growing affluent in the midst of luxury.

She contrived to see very little of Mrs Meeken. It was not only that she disliked the scent with which the air round that old-time type of English womanhood was laden, but also she shunned her because she brought back the painful memory of her dark hour. Sometimes Mr Gedge-Tomkins passed her on the stairs, drawing aside the skirt of his barrister's robe, as if he feared that it would be contaminated by brushing against her. That Pollyooly did not mind at all. She had never respected Mr Gedge-Tomkins. Besides she was quite sure that were the deception to be practised again, for the Lump's sake she would practise it again.

She had been established some ten days in her new home, when one morning Mr Gedge-Tomkins and the Honourable John Ruffin came out of the

doors of their respective chambers at the same moment, on their way to the Law Courts. They greeted one another amicably enough, though either enjoyed something of the contempt for the other of the ant for the butterfly and of the butterfly for the ant. Neither contempt was really well-grounded, for there was more of the ant in the Honourable John Ruffin and more of the butterfly in Mr Gedge-Tomkins than either of them dreamed.

They walked down the stairs in the dignified fashion their robes demanded, talking, with the Englishman's passionate interest, of the weather.

But as they were crossing the King's Bench Walk Mr Gedge-Tomkins said, "I see that you've kept on that dishonest little girl as your laundress, in spite of the way she ticked us about her aunt's death."

"No; she is my housekeeper—my resident housekeeper," said the Honourable John Ruffin, coldly.

"Well, all I can say is, it's putting a premium on dishonesty," said Mr Gedge-Tomkins, in a firmly moral tone.

"I am quite sure that Pollyooly is as honest as the day," said the Honourable John Ruffin; and his eyes sparkled.

"Well, on deception then," said Mr Gedge-Tomkins.

POLLYOOLY CHANGES HER ADDRESS 43

"As long as they do their work and do not rob him, a gentleman has no concern whatever with the morals of his servants. I leave that kind of thing to the middle classes," said the Honourable John Ruffin, haughtily.

"The morals of our servants concern us very deeply," said Mr Gedge-Tomkins, ponderously. "And, mark my words, you'll live to regret having that child about—the deceitful little minx!"

"Evidently you have never come across a real minx, or you wouldn't call Pollyooly one. I hope you'll come across one very soon. She'd do you a world of good," said the Honourable John Ruffin, amiably.

"That child will rob you to a dead certainty," said Mr Gedge-Tomkins, with solemn conviction.

"Well, if she does—not that I believe for an instant she will—I shall never know it. Pollyooly is very intelligent," said the Honourable John Ruffin, flippantly. "At any rate, she is not a perpetual torture to my olfactory nerve. She doesn't smell like an Indian village at Earl's Court."

"I attach far more importance to honesty," said Mr Gedge-Tomkins, even more ponderously.

"I hope you've got it," said the Honourable John Ruffin, in a tone of considerable doubt. Then he added warmly, "Why, hang it all! if Pollyooly hadn't tried to keep her little brother out of the workhouse by concealing the fact that a black-

guardly road-hog had run over her unfortunate aunt, I should have thought very poorly of her indeed."

"Ah, you're one of our unmoral aristocracy," said Mr Gedge-Tomkins, in a tone of sad indulgence. "I'm a plain Englishman."

"And you've got a plain Englishwoman—a devilish plain, Englishwoman—for housekeeper. So if you're not happy, you ought to be," said the Honourable John Ruffin, in the tone of one closing a discussion.

But though he had so firmly deprecated the retention of Pollyooly after her lack of openness, it is to be doubted that Mrs Meeken brought true happiness to Mr Gedge-Tomkins. The impression, though he was no expert in the matter, that his rooms were not as clean as in the days of Pollyooly was growing stronger and stronger in his mind. Also he had not failed to perceive the aroma which Mrs Meeken diffused into the ambient air of the King's Bench Walk. The Honourable John Ruffin's reference to it had the effect of making his nostrils grow more sensitive to it; and he learned that it was a lingering aroma loth to leave a haunt so proper to it as his blackening chambers. Other matters also troubled him at times; but, absorbed in his work, he could give them but little attention.

It was a full ten days after he had so solemnly warned the Honourable John Ruffin against

POLLYOOLY CHANGES HER ADDRESS 45

Pollyooly that, one morning as she was on the very point of setting the rashers of the Honourable John Ruffin to grill, she heard a loud roaring from the chambers of Mr Gedge-Tomkins. It was a sound of a surprising volume; and she hastily opened the door of the Honourable John Ruffin's chambers to discover what it meant, just in time to see Mrs Meeken scuttle forth from the opposite doorway with all the appearance of a panic-stricken, but aromatic, hen.

Mr Gedge-Tomkins stood, four-square and dreadful, in the doorway from which she had fluttered. His large face was flushed, and his eyes glowed with a volcanic indignation.

"Go!" he bellowed in a terrible voice. "My weekly bill has gone up seven shillings! My rooms are filthy! You have stolen half my underlinen! You have not only stolen my whiskey, but you have watered what you left—watered it—watered it! Go! and never come near the place again."

"I want a week's wages instead of notice. I knows my rights," cried Mrs Meeken, quavering, but shrill.

"Not a penny! Not a penny! Go, or I'll throw you down the stairs," belowed Mr Gedge-Tomkins, with a quite extraordinary air of meaning what he said.

He was plainly past the chivalrous stage, and Mrs Meeken did not wait. She shuffled down the stairs

as fast as her feet could slop—there is no other word for their curious action. As she went her voice rose in shrill lamentation: this was what she got for slaving her life out for “ha ’ülkin’ brute” . . . never again as long as she lived would she rescue a stranger from “hartful ’uzzies” . . . Oh, how mistaken she had been in ever reckoning Mr Gedge-Tomkins a gentleman. . .

Mr Gedge-Tomkins stood in his doorway, breathing heavily, his heart still sore from his unsatisfying encounter with watered whiskey the night before. The lament of Mrs. Mecken came up fainter from the well of the staircase. An angelic smile wreathed the lips of Pollyooly who had been a grave spectator of the distressing scene.

The eyes of Mr. Gedge-Tomkins rested on her thoughtfully. His work must not be interrupted again by watered whiskey; he shrank from the trouble of seeking a new laundress.

“You can come back at once. Get my breakfast,” he said in the surly tone of one who reluctantly yields under the pressure of circumstances.

Pollyooly’s heart leapt with joy at this sudden, unexpected doubling of her income. It was on the tip of her tongue to accept the offer. But she checked herself, and gazed at Mr Gedge-Tomkins with a cold eye.

“I couldn’t come back for less than six shillings a week, sir,” she said firmly. “It would take me

POLLYOOLY CHANGES HER ADDRESS 47

ever so long to get your rooms clean again after that dirty old woman. Besides, you said I told lies."

Mr Gedge-Tomkins scowled darkly at her. Without a word he turned round, went back into his chambers, and slammed the door. Pollyooly's face fell at this sudden fortune's sudden flight. But a quarter of an hour later his door opened again, and out he came.

He walked across the landing and said, heavily, "I'll pay you six shillings a week. After all, with you I know the worst that is to be known, and you do not drink whiskey. Get my breakfast."

"Thank you, sir," said Pollyooly, with an angel smile; and she dropped a curtesy.



CHAPTER II.

THE SIEGE

FOR a while he moved smoothly and affluently for Pollyooly in the chambers of the Honourable John Ruffin. On his suggestion, and with his aid, she opened an account with the Post Office Savings Bank, and enjoyed the felicity of seeing the balance to her credit increase every week. For his part, the Honourable John Ruffin was no less content: his bacon was grilled entirely to his liking his rooms were dustless, and he had to hand an intelligent messenger who relieved him of many small, but tiresome, errands. Mr Gedge-Tomkins was content: his weekly bills had shrunk to their natural size; his whiskey was unwatered save by his own firm hand.

The discontented one was Mr Montague Fitzgerald. In the course of his predatory life in the jungle of the Money-lending Acts he had grown well used to rebuffs; but he liked them none the better for that. But that the Honourable John Ruffin should have been the one to rebuff him, filled him with a resentment bitter beyond all words.

It was a shock to his faith in human nature. He had always looked upon him as the model client, a striking type of the great body of the amiable whom a kindly Providence has provided to be the prey of sharks, the model client who pays sixty per cent., not without a murmur indeed, not even without pressure, but pays it. It was no wonder that he was filled with an extraordinary bitterness by this favourite client's revolt against the specious, but iniquitous, bond with which he had tricked his inexperience.

Besides this natural resentment at having been mistaken in his client, Mr Montague Fitzgerald was very deeply wounded by the thought that he was going to lose forty per cent. of the sixty he had been expecting. He could not act on the Honourable John Ruffin's suggestion, and take the case to the High Court, because he would lose it in a fashion which would injure his lately injured business yet more. At one fell blow, and that from the hand of a favourite client, he had lost his faith in human nature and forty per cent.

Mr Montague Fitzgerald forgot the stern business principles which had hitherto governed his, from a business point of view, exemplary career, and allowed himself to become a mere human being burning for revenge.

His vengeance lay ready to his hand in the form most congenial to his spirit. He had made it his

business to acquire an exact knowledge of the Honourable John Ruffin's position, a far more exact knowledge of it indeed than the Honourable John Ruffin had ever possessed himself. He knew to a penny the amount of the Oxford debts which the Honourable John Ruffin was paying off by instalments; he bought them up with the intention of making his life a burden to him by setting the law at work to make him pay them forthwith.

Thus it came about that just before breakfast one morning, what time Pollyooly, her angel brow puckered by an anxious frown, was carefully grilling his bacon, the Honourable John Ruffin stood on his hearthrug, his brow puckered by a yet more anxious frown, reading a letter from the lawyer who did the almost invariably dirty work of Mr Montague Fitzgerald, a letter threatening him with the unpleasant processes of the law, unless he paid forthwith the sum of seven hundred and fifty-four pounds.

Pollyooly gave the bacon a last, carefully-considered turn, carefully drained the grease from each slice, put them on a carefully warmed dish, and carried it into the sitting-room. The face of the Honourable John Ruffin, usually so careless and serene, was set in a gloomy frown which filled her with surprise and a sympathetic uneasiness; but it cleared somewhat at the sight of bacon; and he came briskly to the table, sat down, and began to

eat it, while Pollyooly set about her regular morning task of collecting the garments with which, in the course of selecting his apparel for the day, he had bestrewn the room.

He ate two slices of bacon; then he said in a gloomy voice, "The evil day is upon us, Pollyooly."

"Yes, sir," said Pollyooly, in a tone of respectful sympathy.

~~It~~ moved the Honourable John Ruffin to unbosom himself; and he went on: "Do you remember a rogue of the name of Montague Fitzgerald who came to see me one morning?"

"Yes, sir. His hair shone like his hat, and he was very angry when he went away," said Pollyooly, with a gentle smile of pleased remembrance.

"He does shine, the greasy usurer," said the Honourable John Ruffin, with vindictive conviction. "But I made him rather too angry by refusing to pay his confounded loan twice over. He has bought up all my Oxford debts, and is going to writ me for the whole amount. You do not know what Oxford debts are, being, fortunately for yourself, of the sheltered, but overwhelming, female sex; and you don't know what writting is, since you are a happy English child. But both are very unpleasant things. I was paying those debts comfortably, or rather uncomfortably, by instalments. You know what instalments are, Pollyooly?"

"Burial money," said Pollyooly, after a little thoughtful consideration.

"Instalments are the curse of the British Empire; and whole amounts are worse," said the Honourable John Ruffin, in a tone of genuine feeling. "Well, I can't pay the whole amount at present, so we must stave off the evil day."

"Yes, sir," said Pollyooly.

"I must not be writted. That is the first evil day to stave off. I must have time. Time, Pollyooly, is a wonderful thing."

"Yes, sir," said Pollyooly.

"With time I can set about arranging to get the money to pay this abominable whole amount. I must, Pollyooly, strain my credit."

"Yes, sir," said Pollyooly, moving towards the bedroom with an armful of assorted trousers.

"Have you ever reflected what a weakly thing credit is—how easily it is strained?" said the Honourable John Ruffin.

"No, sir," said Pollyooly, pausing.

"It is a weakling indeed—alas, that it should be so!" said the Honourable John Ruffin, very sadly.

Pollyooly said nothing; but she gazed at him with the limpid, sympathetic eyes of a sorrowing angel.

The Honourable John Ruffin paused, considering. Pollyooly carried the armful of trousers into the bedroom and restored them to their presses.

When she came back into the sitting-room; the Honourable John Ruffin said, "Well, you see, Pollyooly, the first thing to do is to postpone the pain of being writted. Till I am writted the Law is powerless—paralysed. Therefore I proclaim a state of siege. Do you know what a state of siege is, Pollyooly?"

"No, sir," said Pollyooly.

It means that no stranger must be let into my rooms between daybreak and after dark, when the King's writ ceases to run. Fortunately the King's writ is not a night-bird. We shall have to shut ourselves in."

"Do you mean all day, sir?" said Pollyooly, knitting her brow.

"I fear so," said the Honourable John Ruffin. "From daybreak till after dark."

"But how am I to get Mr Gedge-Tomkins' breakfast?" said Pollyooly, anxiously.

"That's a difficulty," said the Honourable John Ruffin, frowning. Then he said cheerfully: "However, it's no good meeting trouble half-way, when the time comes we shall find a plan. You and the Lump can always steal out early in the morning, take up your abode in the chambers of Mr Gedge-Tomkins, and return after the King's writ has ceased its baneful activity for the day, and stopped running. I can get my own breakfast."

"But *you*' can't cook your bacon, sir," said Pollyooly, in a tone of dismayed conviction..

"I must be content with cold ham," said the Honourable John Ruffin, sadly. "I think I could boil my eggs."

"I think you'd boil them hard, sir," said Pollyooly, doubtful.

"There's no saying. I might get into it," said the Honourable John Ruffin, hopefully.

Pollyooly shook her head sadly; and her face showed no hopefulness at all as she carried the other garments she had collected into his bedroom.

For the next half hour, and for the next few days, when she happened to think of the danger which threatened the quiet peace of their little household, Pollyooly wore a grave air. The Honourable John Ruffin on the other hand, when that danger chiefly concerned, showed himself entirely serene. He was even cheerful. He talked freely and frequently of the slow approach of the besiegers, with the impersonal interest of one regarding the evil fortune of an acquaintance.

On the morning on which he reckoned that the lawyer of Mr Montague Fitzgerald, having received no answer to his demand for the sum of £754, would set the law in motion by issuing a writ, he proclaimed the state of siege.

Then he said, "The object, Mrs Bride, of this

state of siege in which we are now living, is to prevent the common bailiff from presenting me with a blue document purporting to come from his Gracious Majesty the King, but really coming from a most unpleasant little greasy shark in Bloomsbury."

"Yes, sir," said Pollyooly, gravely.

"Well, I'm relying very much on you to prevent a common bailiff from entering my presence. Do you know what a common bailiff is like?"

"No, sir," said Pollyooly.

"Well, a common bailiff is a very respectable man, with a quite inconsistently red nose. He wears either a black frock coat of ancient fashion, or a morning coat of the same shape as I wear at the Courts. But whether he wears a frock coat or a morning coat, the elbows of that coat are shiny, and in places it will be green."

He looked at Pollyooly to see whether she was grasping these important details, and found her regarding him with an air of grave and concentrated attention.

He gathered that she was grasping them, and went on, "His trousers are nearly sure to be of the hue which colourists describe as pepper and salt—dark speckled trousers, Mrs Bride. His cravat will be a flat, black plaster, slightly greenish; and he will wear a bowler hat. Do you think you will know one when you see him?"

"Oh, yes, 'sir," said Pollyooly, with assured conviction.

"Well then, you keep the Oak always shut; and when any one knocks on it, you go to it gently, and peep at them through the slit of the letter-box. When you see a common bailiff on the landing, you leave him there. If I'm at home you tell me; and if I'm not at home, and he waits for me on the landing, you hang a towel out of my bedroom window, and, like Orion, I slope slowly to the West and remain there till the shades of night have fallen fast, and the King's writ has ceased its baneful activity for the day. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir—quite," said Pollyooly, with assurance.

"Well, it's a considerable burden to lay on such little shoulders," said the Honourable John Ruffin, with a sigh. "But if my furniture were seized and I were hauled away to the darkest dungeons of Holloway, I don't know what I could do for you and the Lump."

"I don't mind, sir. I shall like doing it," said Pollyooly, quickly; and she smiled a ravishing smile.

The Honourable John Ruffin sighed again: "I can't fly with you and the Lump, for I haven't the money at the moment," he said. "Besides, there's my work. But I do hope it will be another lesson to me not to be swindled so easily. I doubt if I had a hundred pounds worth of goods for that

seven hundred and fifty." Then he smiled, and added cheerfully, "But let me not idly repine. I grow wiser and wiser."

After that day as soon as the bacon of the Honourable John Ruffin had been grilled, Pollyooly and the Lump betook themselves to the chambers of Mr Gedge-Tomkins that she might be free to cook his breakfast.

At last the besiegers, or to be exact, the besieger, came at half-past ten in the morning. Pollyooly and the Lump were in Mr Gedge-Tomkins' chambers, when she heard a knocking at the Honourable John Ruffin's door. She peeped through Mr Gedge-Tomkins' letter-box, and there, knocking steadily away, stood a respectable, but red-nosed, man in a greenish-black morning coat, a high, but dirty collar, a greenish-black plaster of a tie, and a dingy, flat-topped bowler hat. After the Honourable John Ruffin's admirable description of the species, Pollyooly recognised him at a glance as the common bailiff.

He was plainly unused to working in the Temple, or he would not have gone on rapping so hopefully on the Honourable John Ruffin's oak, for when once the unknocked oak is 'sporting' (*Anglice*, shut) it means that the occupant of the chambers is literally, or figuratively, out. The besieger could not have known this, for he remained a quarter of an hour, rapping patiently, at

three-minute intervals, on the Honourable John Ruffin's oak.

Then he came and knocked at Mr Gedge-Tomkins' door. Pollyooly opened it.

"Mr Ruffin in?" he said, jerking a dirty thumb towards the door opposite.

Pollyooly had not heard the Honourable John Ruffin start for the Law Courts, and he might not have done so. This ignorance served her well, for she had been brought up a very truthful child; and with exact accuracy she said, "I don't know. I haven't see him go in or out since yesterday morning."

"What's he like to look at?" said the respectable, but red-nosed, man gloomily.

Pollyooly knitted her brow, as if in an earnest effort to remember; then she said, "Well, he looks very nice in his wig."

"What coloured eyes 'as 'e got?" said the red-faced man.

"They might be brown, and again they might not," said Pollyooly, after a little thought.

As a matter of fact, the eyes of the Honourable John Ruffin are a very fine gray. But Pollyooly was resolved with an equal firmness neither to impart any information nor to depart from the truth.

"A fat lot you kids learn at school," said the red-nosed man with some heat.

"They didn't teach us those sort of things," said Pollyooly, simply.

"What time does 'e come 'ome?" said the red-nosed man.

"Late at night," said Pollyooly, truthfully.

The respectable, but red-nosed, man gazed at her gloomily for a minute, then he turned on his heel and went slowly down the stairs.

Pollyooly ran to Mr Gedge-Tomkins' sitting-room window and watched him leave the building and the Inner Temple. She thought it well to let the Honourable John Ruffin know at once that the tardy besieger had at last come, and, taking the Lump, she went across to the Law Courts, induced the door-keeper of the Court No. IV., in which he was at work, to summon him forth, and informed him of the danger. He thanked her, and bade her be ready to signal to him at a quarter past four, if the red-faced man was waiting to pounce on him. He went back into the Court; and, after finishing her work in Mr Gedge-Tomkins' chambers, she took the Lump to the gardens on the Thames Embankment, and let him play there for the rest of the morning.

When she returned to the Temple at half-past one, there, knocking patiently on the Honourable John Ruffin's oak, stood the red-faced man.

"'As 'e come in?" he said gloomily.

"I haven't seen him come in," said Pollyooly,

coldly, but with literal accuracy; and she and the Lump went into Mr Gedge-Tomkins' chambers.

Pollyooly was in a quandary. Both their dinner and her money were in the chambers of the Honourable John Ruffin; and the red-nosed man stood, an insuperable and patiently knocking barrier between.

She watched him through the letter-box of Mr Gedge-Tomkins with growing impatience. He seemed to her to be a creature of the most painful persistence, for he stood there, rapping at intervals, for nearly twenty minutes; and the Lump, usually the most placid of children, was pulling at her frock, and protesting that he was hungry in an uncommonly querulous tone.

Pollyooly was debating in her active mind whether she should sally forth with him to the Honourable John Ruffin's greengrocer in Fetter Lane and try to procure food on credit, when, to her great relief, the exasperated besieger bestowed three violent kicks on the Honourable John Ruffin's quite unoffending oak, and went heavily down the stairs. She was quick in getting the Lump into their own quarters and to his dinner. She resolved to have the materials for that meal in Mr Gedge-Tomkins' chambers for the future.

At three o'clock the besieger returned and knocked for a quarter of an hour, then once more he went away. Pollyooly took up her station at

the window of the sitting-room and kept her patient watch, while the Lump either played peacefully about the floor, or sat in her lap, and, deaf to her remonstrances, sucked his thumb. At four o'clock the unwearied besieger came slouching gloomily back. Pollyooly ran for the signal towel and hung it out of the window.

At a quarter-past four the Honourable John Ruffin appeared at the mouth of the archway opposite, approaching his home warily. At the sight of the signal he paused, then came swiftly across the broad space to the pavement below the window.

"Where is he?" he said, hardly raising his clear, carrying voice.

"On the landing," said Pollyooly.

"Then please drop me down my hat and stick, my angel watcher," said the Honourable John Ruffin.

Pollyooly made haste to drop them out of the window. He caught them deftly, slipped off his wig and gown, went to the porter's lodge, left them there, and walked briskly out of the Tudor Street entrance. As he was passing out of sight, he waved a reassuring hand to his faithful sentinel.

At half-past four the red-nosed besieger, who had been waiting in a sinister silence, began to knock on the oak. At five and twenty minutes to five he was knocking firmly; at twenty minutes to

five he was knocking wildly ; at a quarter to five he seemed to have lost his temper, for he was interspersing violent blows on the oak with even more violent kicks. At five minutes to five he went away. Pollyooly thought that they had done with him until the morrow. She wronged his indefatigable soul ; he was back again and hammering away at seven o'clock and again at eight. He may have returned later, just before the King's writ had ceased running its baneful course for the day ; but Pollyooly was sleeping the sound sleep of the young and just, and she did not hear him.

The next morning the besieger arrived betimes. Pollyooly had cleaned both sets of rooms and was back cooking the Honourable John Ruffin's breakfast, when she recognised his heavy footfall on the stairs.

She was not dismayed at first. Mr Gedge-Tomkins worked at his briefs from seven to nine and then breakfasted. It was now only half-past eight. Pollyooly had grasped the fact that the patience of the besieger became exhausted in less than half an hour. She had forgotten, if indeed she had ever known, the stimulating effect of the sense of smell. He knocked ; and then he was quiet for a while. Then the trained olfactory nerve of his red, but sleuth-hound, nose carried the smell of grilling bacon to his astute brain ; and he leapt to the conclusion that the chambers were not empty.

He began to knock. Pollyooly was in hopes that he would soon tire and go away. She carried in the Honourable John Ruffin's breakfast; and the knocking still went on. At a quarter to nine she went to the Honourable John Ruffin with a distressed air, and asked him what she should do about Mr Gedge-Tomkins' breakfast.

"Mr Gedge-Tomkins is one of those splendid Spartan fellows who will rejoice to go into court breakfastless," said the Honourable John Ruffin, with calm cheerfulness.

"He'll be very angry with me, and he does make such a noise when he's angry," said Pollyooly, with a somewhat plaintive dismay.

"We can't have that," said the Honourable John Ruffin, quickly; and he knitted his brow and tried to think out a plan.

He could think of none. All those that his fertile mind conceived were unfeasible or quite extravagant. It was impossible in the time, or with the means at his disposal, a small hammer, a corkscrew, and the poker, to make a sufficiently large opening in the wall between the two sets of chambers to admit the passage of Pollyooly.

Then Pollyooly said, "Please, sir, if I stood close against your oak, and you had the front door nearly shut, when I opened the oak you could shut it quite before he got in. I'm very narrow."

"You have not only the face of an angel, but the

brain of a "first-class strategist. For a child of twelve you are a marvel, Mrs Bride. But do not—oh, do not let it lead you to Socialism," said the Honourable John Ruffin, with warm admiration; and he rose briskly.

The besieger was now taking a rest from his labour at the oak; and through the slit of the letter-box Pollyooly saw him leaning against the bannisters. She flattened herself against the oak, and the Honourable John Ruffin nearly closed the inner door.

"Ready," he said.

The oak flew open; like a jack-in-the-box, Pollyooly sprang out on to the landing, and the Honourable John Ruffin shut the inner door with a snap.

The besieger opened his mouth and started forward: "'Ere? Where? What?" he stuttered.

Pollyooly darted past him into Mr Gedge-Tomkins' door, which she had left just unshut against emergency, and slammed it behind her.

The besieger, in a veritable fury, fell upon the knocker on the Honourable John Ruffin's inner door, and plied it with a will.

It made a grand noise; never before in his life had he had such a thoroughly satisfying time with a knocker. The landing and the staircase reverberated the filling sound. But it did not open the

door. It did, however, seem to interfere with the work of Mr Gedge-Tomkins. He rushed down his passage, bounced on to the landing, and suddenly bellowed into the absorbed besieger's happy ear :

“ What on earth are you doing ? What are you making this infernal row for ? ”

The besieger sprang lightly into the air. Mr Gedge-Tomkins was a fine, upstanding, broad-chested man ; and his bellow was of about the same sound and volume as the trumpeting of a well-grown bull elephant. As the besieger landed on his feet, he howled with some spirit : “ What's it got to do with you ? I am doing my dooty.”

Mr Gedge-Tomkins presented to him a fist of the size of a small leg of lamb ; held it firmly a few inches from his eyes that he might thoroughly inspect it ; then he bellowed : “ Do you see what this is ? Be off, or I'll do a little knocking on my own account ! ”

The besieger gazed earnestly for ten seconds at that able fist, and retired, or, to be exact, skipped half-way down the first flight of stairs.

There he stopped, and glaring up at the majestic presence above him, cried, “ Hi'm a horficer of the lor. Hi'm servin' a writ on this 'ere Mr Ruffin.” And he brandished a blue document at Mr Gedge-Tomkins.

“ Serve it ! Serve it ! . But you be as quiet as a mouse about it—as quiet as a mouse—or I'll push

it down your throat," bellowed Mr Gedge-Tomkins ; and he went back into his chambers with a fine, majestic air, and slammed the door.

The besieger wiped his brow with a dirty blue pocket-handkerchief, then stole gingerly up the stairs, and leaning against the banisters, resumed his watch, panting softly. His morning nerves, of the kind which so frequently accompany a red nose, were all to pieces. He was shaken to the depths of his being.

Pollyooly cooked Mr Gedge-Tomkins' breakfast with uncommon care—she had suddenly begun to respect him.

Hitherto she had rather despised him. His refusal, on hearing of the death of her Aunt Hannah, to let her retain the post of housekeeper, the duties of which she had discharged with so thorough an efficiency, on the ground that she had deceived him, had not only ruffled her sensibilities but also given her a very poor opinion of Mr Gedge-Tomkins' intelligence. The alternative to herself he had chosen was to any intelligent eye utterly unworthy to be the housekeeper of even a tramp.

Accordingly she had regarded Mr Gedge-Tomkins as merely a taciturn, earnest, hard-working barrister, wholly unworthy any genuine admiration or esteem, not at all the kind of man to whom one could attach oneself. His sudden, terrific explosion

in the part of a man of violence raised him immeasurably in her estimation. For the first time he took her girlish fancy; and she grilled his bacon with some of the loving care she was used to devote to that of the Honourable John Ruffin.

Mr Gedge-Tomkins ate that bacon more slowly and thoughtfully than usual. At the end of it, when she brought him his eggs, he said with a judicial air and in a judicial tone: .

"I think that in—er—er more favourable circumstances you might be trained to be a cook of some merit."

"Yes, sir," said Pollyooly.

She was pleased by the compliment, and went on with her work in a complacent frame of mind. But her troubles were by no means over; for his little altercation with Mr Gedge-Tomkins seemed to have braced all the dogged Englishman in the red-nosed besieger to the highest pitch; and he had apparently made up his mind to stay the day.

At half-past eleven he still leaned against the banisters, an air of cold resolution on his square face; and Pollyooly began to grow anxious about the Lump. She was sure that the Honourable John Ruffin would look after him—not that he needed much looking after. But his dinner-hour was approaching; he would not fail to make firmly known that it was his dinner-hour; and her instinct warned her

that her kind-hearted employer would give him indigestible things to eat, and then have him ill on his hands all the afternoon. She cudgelled and cudgelled her brains for some method of getting back into her own quarters without letting in the besieger on her heels ; but she could find none.

Even her natural serenity could not stand the strain of her dire imaginings ; and by a quarter to one she had worked herself into a fever of anxiety. Then a happy idea came to her. She ran up to the attic above Mr Gedge-Tomkins' sitting-room, opened the window and looked out.

The window of her own attic was fifteen feet away, and open. The slope of the roof was not very steep ; also, if she did slip, there was a broad gutter ; and she thought it looked strong. She took off her shoes, slipped out of the window, and tested the grip of her feet on the tiles. Her feet gripped them firmly ; for the course of time had worn away their original seventeenth-century smoothness, and many little tufts of lichen helped to hold the sole. She began to crawl, firmly, in a course slanting slightly upwards, to a point above her own window.

Of course, a policeman on the further pavement of the King's Bench Walk, having nothing else to do, espied her in her perilous transit, and with all the intelligence of his force and race, shouted at her. Pollyooly had perfect nerves ; but it was just as

well at the moment that she did not hear him, though, indeed, she was not thinking at all of the danger, but only of getting as quickly as possible to the Lump, who might even now be devouring indigestible things.

The policeman's shouts quickly gathered together a little crowd; and the Honourable John Ruffin at his window could not for the life of him understand at what they were pointing in such excitement, or why some of them danced up and down in such a curious and apparently aimless fashion.

Pollyooly arrived presently at a point four feet above the dormer window of her attic, and slid quickly down on to its little roof. She sat astride it for a moment, and took a brief and calm survey of the Temple. She observed the anxious crowd of watchers, still excited and gesticulating, and waved her hand to it. Then she slipped over the edge of the roof, on to the window ledge, and into the window.

The Honourable John Ruffin was still wondering at the little burst of cheers from the crowd which greeted the safe conclusion of her perilous transit, when Pollyooly entered his sitting-room, to find the Lump with a large slice of the uncommonly rich and indigestible cake, with which the Honourable John Ruffin was wont to regale his friends at afternoon tea, half-eaten in his hand.

"Where on earth have you come from?"

cried the 'Honourable John Ruffin in extreme astonishment.

"I crawled along the roof, and in through the window of our bedroom, sir," said Pollyooly, firmly removing the slice of cake from the reluctant hand of the Lump.

"But it's a sloping roof!" cried the Honourable John Ruffin yet more loudly.

"Yes, sir. It does slope," said Pollyooly, looking surprised at his vehemence.

The Honourable John Ruffin said no more at the moment. He ran out of the room, and rushed up the stairs to the attic, and looked out of the window.

He came down, with his face somewhat pale, and said in a scared tone, "Never, on any account, crawl along that roof again. I forbid it absolutely. I'd rather be writted ten times over than that you should do such a dangerous thing."

"Yes, sir," said Pollyooly meekly, but she looked a little puzzled by his vehemence.

"What on earth did you do it for?" he said in an easier tone.

"I thought that the Lump would bother you, sir, and you wouldn't know what to give him for dinner," said Pollyooly.

"You thought the Lump would bother me and I shouldn't know what to give him for dinner! So you crawl along a sloping roof, sixty feet from

the ground to get to us ! ” cried the Honourable John Ruffin in a tone of stupefaction.

“ He might have had indigestion,” said Pollyooly.

The Honourable John Ruffin raised both hands towards the ceiling, and cried loudly, “ I tell you, Pollyooly, that the female sex is one of the most remarkable phenomena that crawl about the earth ! ”

“ Yes, sir,” said Pollyooly in amiable assent.

She did not resent the doubtful tribute to her sex ; she did not understand it. That did not matter ; often she did not understand the Honourable John Ruffin. None the less she did not doubt that he was right. She took the eager Lump up to their attic to give him his dinner.

She had barely reached their attic when there came the tramp of many feet on the staircase. The policeman, in a rapfure at having something to do, was coming to express his disapproval of Pollyooly’s startling activity ; and many of the crowd came with him. He knocked ; and the door was not opened to him. He had a short talk with the red-nosed besieger ; then, apprised of the delicacy of the situation, he went away.

The red-nosed man did not. An hour after lunch the Honourable John Ruffin grew tired of his own society, and fetched Pollyooly and the Lump down from their attic and told them stories, gave them tea, and then told them more stories. He

drew a keen pleasure from changing the grave and serious expression which, for the most part, rested on Pollyooly's angel face to a natural, careless, childlike gleefulness.

At six o'clock the red-nosed watcher on the threshold could no longer withstand the demands of his so long unslaked gullet, unslaked, that is, by anything more alluring than the water that flowed from the tap on the ground floor. With that thin beverage he had washed down the lunch of bread and cheese he had brought so snug and warm in the tail-pocket of his morning coat. He heard the summoning, clear call of the beer; and he went.

The Honourable John Ruffin escaped swiftly but discreetly. Pollyooly scouted ahead of him, as far as Middle Temple Lane. It was empty; and he hurried down it to breathe with relief the free air of the Thames Embankment. He did not return till the King's writ had gone to its well-earned rest.

At eight o'clock the next morning the red-nosed besieger was at his post, teeming with dogged resolution. But Pollyooly was careless of him; the Honourable John Ruffin now understood the diet of the Lump: she had explained it to him fully and at length. As soon as she had cooked his bacon, she made her jack-in-the-box exit from his chambers into those of Mr Gedge-Tomkins; and

the red-nosed watcher observed her passage in silence but with a very gloomy eye.

When she carried in his breakfast, Mr Gedge-Tomkins broke from his usual taciturnity, and asked her how the siege was progressing. Since his manly explosion of the morning before had disposed her to regard him with the kindest favour, Pollyooly was affably open with him. She told him of the red-nosed besieger's dogged pertinacity, and how she had had to crawl along the roof from his attic to her own to get back to the Lump.

"You're not going to do that again to-day?" said Mr Gedge-Tomkins sharply.

"No, sir. Mr Ruffin is going to look after the Lum'—Roger, sir, and give him the right things to eat."

"The offshoots of the aristocracy are the curse of the professions," said Mr Gedge-Tomkins with stern precision. "Why doesn't he pay his debts instead of looking after young children, an avocation for which he is entirely unqualified?"

"The Lump doesn't want much looking after, sir," said Pollyooly in a tone of apology.

"I do not like that red-nosed fellow. I believe he drinks," said Mr Gedge-Tomkins thoughtfully, with a gloomy frown.

"I shouldn't wonder, sir," said Pollyooly.

"When you're ready to go back to Mr Ruffin's

chambers, let me know. I will manage it for you," said Mr Gedge-Tomkins in a tone of gloomy menace which boded ill to the dogged Englishman.

"Thank you, sir," said Pollywooly joyfully.

At ten o'clock she had finished her work in his rooms, and Mr Gedge-Tomkins had finished his morning pipe, and was ready for the Courts.

He went to the window and shouted, "Ruffin! Ruffin!"

The Honourable John Ruffin put his head out of his window.

"If you'll stand at your door and be ready to let Mary, Bride in, I think I can clear the dipsomaniac fellow off the landing," said Mr Gedge-Tomkins.

"Thank you—thank you very much," said the Honourable John Ruffin.

Mr Gedge-Tomkins put on his wig and gown, and, followed by Pollywooly, went to his front door, flung it violently open, bounded heavily out on to the landing, and bellowed at the besieger: "What are you loafing about on my half of the landing? I won't have it! Do you hear, you bottle-nosed ruffian? I won't have it!"

The morning nerves of the red-faced man jumped all ways at the shock, he bolted half-way down the flight of stairs, then turned to expostulate.

"You're on my half of the staircase now! Get off it!" bellowed Mr Gedge-Tomkins; and Polly-

only passed quickly behind him into the Honourable John Ruffin's chambers.

The red-nosed, but dogged, Englishman uttered a short howl of grief at the sight; then he said: "Which is your 'alf.guv'nor?"

Mr Gedge-Tomkins came down the staircase, his majestic presence nearly filling it. "What's that to you, my man?" he bellowed. "Do you think I'm going to spend my day answering the questions of every idle loafer in London?"

The red-nosed man shuffled down the stairs before the majestic advance. There was nothing else to do. In a tweed suit Mr Gedge-Tomkins filled most of the wide staircase; in his gown he filled all of it. The besieger did not go up the stairs till Mr Gedge-Tomkins' majestic form had disappeared through the archway on the further side of the King's Bench Walk. He was too busy shaking his fist at that spreading back, and relieving his overburdened heart of the sentiments which oppressed it.

He returned to his post more dogged than ever; and thanks to the kindly offices of the vengeful Mrs Meeken, who for a small, gin-procuring, consideration, brought him beer in a jug, he was able to prolong his watch to the very hour at which the King's writ ceased to run.

But the Honourable John Ruffin and his household, entertaining one another in simple pastimes,

were heedless of him. Both Pollyooly and the Lump came to consider a state of siege the most fortunate condition of life.

The next morning there was no red-nosed man. He had not appeared at ten o'clock. But the Honourable John Ruffin was not to be lured carelessly into the open.

"Will you go on a scouting expedition, Pollyooly?" he said.

Pollyooly opened her beautiful blue eyes in a mute question.

"Will you go and hunt the Temple carefully, and a little of Fleet Street, and see that the besieger is not lurking about? I'll mind the Lump—a girl scout should travel unhampered."

"Yes, sir," said Pollyooly eagerly; and she went quickly forth.

Now the absence of the red-nosed watcher on the threshold was brought about by the fact that the night before he had found awaiting him in his little Poplar home an imperative summons to visit Mr Montague Fitzgerald at his private flat in Mount Street at nine o'clock that morning. He had made haste to obey the summons because Mr Montague Fitzgerald added much, by his tips, to the salary which he received for plaguing his fellow-creatures by the faithful discharge of the function of bailiff.

He found the moneylender grossly breakfasting on liver and bacon horribly fried in the

same pan; and the moneylender greeted him with a black scowl, for he could not brook the Law's delay when he was on the right side of it.

"Why hasn't the writ been served on that fellow Ruffin, my man?" he said sharply. "Are you going to take a month about it? I got you appointed to the job, though it's off your usual beat, because I thought I could rely on you to be smart about it."

"There's no gettin' at 'im to serve it," said the dogged one doggedly.

"No getting at him? Nonsense! A careless young ass like that!" cried Mr Montague Fitzgerald contemptuously.

The long pent-up emotion of the faithful bailiff burst forth in an eloquently passionate, but husky, denunciation of the Honourable John Ruffin, Pollyooly, and Mr Gedge-Tomkins. In a hoarse, but rasping, tone he related how they had so far foiled him.

Mr Montague Fitzgerald heard him to the end with close attention; then, frowning darkly, he said in a sinister tone, "The thing for you to do, my man, is to pounce—pounce."

"But 'ow, guvner?" said the sorrowful bailiff.

"I'll show you. I'll put you on to him," said Mr Montague Fitzgerald with heartening con-

fidence. "Your not going to the Temple this morning will put him off his guard. We shall catch him at once. It's a dead snip."

"Right O, guvner," said the bailiff hopefully.

Mr. Montague Fitzgerald handed him over to his man, with instructions that he was to have beer, and once more addressed himself grossly to his liver and bacon. After his breakfast he smoked much of a large, thick, black cigar; and then, his heart aglow at the prospect of not only himself worsting the man who had not paid him sixty per cent., but also of witnessing his discomfiture, he drove to the Law Courts with the bailiff. He had reckoned without Pollyooly.

Pollyooly came forth from the chambers of the Honourable John Ruffin fully alive to the seriousness of the mission with which she was charged. None the less, after a while, she could not help feeling that it was one of the most interesting and amusing games of hide-and-seek she had ever played. She peeped round corners before turning them; she ran swiftly through archways and out of passages in hope to surprise the enemy slinking out of sight. She found no red-nosed man or, to be exact, no red-nosed man she sought, in the Temple; and Fleet Street was also free from him. She slipped across the road and peered into the great hall of the Law Courts. There stood the red-nosed besieger; and beside him shone Mr Montague

Fitzgerald. They were on the look-out for a tall figure in wig and gown, not for a slip of a child in a blue frock; and their eager, expectant eyes missed her. She ran quickly back to the Temple with her information.

The Honourable John Ruffin sang a cheerful little song as he put on a morning coat and a silk hat; then he said: "I'm going, Pollyooly, in search of an uncle—a rich uncle. I must have a rich uncle somewhere; and I will find him; for I feel that this siege is wearing you out, that you are on the way to a nervous breakdown."

"Oh, I don't mind it at all, sir," said Pollyooly cheerfully. "I like it."

"So much excitement is bad for one so young," he said sententiously; and he departed gaily by the Tudor Street entrance.

Pollyooly put their dinner into Mr Gedge-Tomkins' kitchen, and took the Lump to the Embankment Gardens for fresh air and exercise. It was as well that she had taken precautions; for on her return she found the red-nosed man at his post. With an air of contemptuous dignity, Pollyooly led the Lump past him into Mr Gedge-Tomkins' chambers.

The red-nosed besieger gazed at the closed door with a bitter scowl. He had waited for an hour and a half in the Law Courts with a moneylender

who as he waxed more and more impatient at the waste of a morning he would fain have spent fleecing the high-spirited youth of his adopted country, waxed more and more bitter in his criticism of the incompetence of the salaried instruments of the Law.

Before he lost hope that the Honourable John Ruffin would fall into his hands, and departed to his congenial employment, he bade the exacerbad bailiff wait on him at his office at five o'clock that afternoon. He was of the opinion that by that hour his ingenious mind would have found the solution of this writ-serving problem.

At five o'clock, therefore, the bailiff presented himself to the moneylender; and the moneylender beamed on him with a proud smile.

"I've got it," he said with enthusiastic confidence. "It ain't often that the intelleck of Monty fails to do the trick when once it gets working. That little red-haired brat is our game. She has the key of Ruffin's door in her pocket. We take it from her—I'll lend you a 'elping 'and—you open his door and serve the writ; and there you are!"

"There may be trouble, guvner," said the red-nosed one doubtfully.

"Trouble? Trouble?" said the moneylender with a bright cheerfulness, flapping his leg above his pocket so that the money in it clinked.

"There's no trouble—no serious trouble where those are, my boy."

The event proved him right. • But then there is trouble and trouble.

The next morning when Pollyooly was ready to go to the chambers of Mr Gedge-Tomkins she took a peep through the letter-box and saw that the red-nosed besieger had returned to his watch and was leaning against the banisters. • She was not dismayed. It was all one to her blithe spirit whether she left the chambers of the Honourable John Ruffin in the manner of a Jack-in-the-box or sedately. But she did not see Mr Montague Fitzgerald who was shining against the wall a few steps down the staircase.

She flattened herself against the oak; the Honourable John Ruffin made ready to snap to the inner door; she drew back the latch, and sprang out with the opening oak. Then the red-nosed besieger stepped in front of her; and Mr Montague Fitzgerald bounded up the stairs and caught her by the arm.

"The key! Give me Mr Ruffin's key!" he cried in a tone of exultant triumph.

It was instinct which caused Pollyooly to kick him violently on the shins; but it was reason which caused her to grasp the gravity of the situation and scream with all the force of her young and healthy lungs.

She was half-way through the second scream. when the door of both sets of chambers opened. The Honourable John Ruffin, emerging lightly, hit Mr Montague Fitzgerald on the left side of the head with a force which would have driven him and Pollyooly right across the landing, had not Mr. Gedge-Tomkins chanced about the same instant to hit him on the right side of the head with a force that restored their equilibrium.

With a quiet, but thoroughly satisfied grunt, Mr Montague Fitzgerald sat heavily down on the floor. The morning nerves of the red-nosed besieger again went jagged; and with a howl he bolted down the stairs as Pollyooly bolted through Mr Gedge-Tomkins' door.

"She's all right! Get back, Ruffin, or you'll be writted!" cried Mr Gedge-Tomkins.

The Honourable John Ruffin got back, and slammed his oak.

Mr Gedge-Tomkins bent down over the somewhat dazed moneylender, enveloped the scruff of his neck in his voluminous grip, jerked him painfully to his feet, marched him down the stairs, and handed him over to the policeman at the Tudor Street gate of the Temple. From there he accompanied them to the Police Station, and on behalf of Pollyooly preferred against him a charge of assault and battery. He left him there, still

too dazed to make any defence, and returned to the Temple in majestic triumph.

The red-nosed besieger was not at his post; indeed, he was still busy applying the balm of beer to his jagged nerves; and Mr Gedge-Tomkins went into the Honourable John Ruffin's sitting-room. They held a conference of some length; and Mr Gedge-Tomkins was apprised of the exact situation. They decided to press to the utmost the charge of assault against Mr Montague Fitzgerald.

There was, however, no occasion to press it. That afternoon on his return from the Law Courts an extremely unpleasant-looking person called on Mr Gedge-Tomkins and declared himself to be Mr Montague Fitzgerald's solicitor equipped with the powers of a plenipotentiary.

He was a smoothly spoken man, but quite frank and open. Indeed, he told Mr Gedge-Tomkins that he would be quite frank with him. A prosecution for assaulting a child would be very painful to his high-spirited client, who abhorred above all things a reputation for harshness. Therefore he was prepared to withdraw the writ for the whole amount of the Honourable John Ruffin's Oxford debts, and let him continue to pay them by instalments. Mr Gedge-Tomkins was no less frank; he was even brutal. He showed an entire lack of consideration for the fine feelings of

Mr Montague Fitzgerald, whom he called "That blackguardly shark," and in the end protracted the time of payment of the Oxford debts one-third, by the simple device of lessening each instalment by one-third.

That settled, he called in the Honourable John Ruffin and Pollyooly, and informed him of the arrangement he had made. The Honourable John Ruffin thanked him warmly for having handled his affairs in such a thoroughly satisfactory manner.

Then he turned to the lawyer and said :

"Fitzgerald's proposal is all very well for me ; but where does Mary Bride here come in ? It was she who was assaulted and battered."

"Mr Fitzgerald commissioned me to offer her two pounds as a solatium," said the lawyer.

"Make it twenty," said the Honourable John Ruffin, quietly.

"Twenty ! But she was not really hurt !" cried the lawyer in a tone of horror.

"There is such a thing as nervous shock," said the Honourable John Ruffin, coldly.

"I must say she doesn't look to me to be suffering from nervous shock," said the lawyer, peering at Pollyooly, with his little ferret eyes.

"Do you mean to say that you don't see how pale she is ?" said the Honourable John Ruffin with some heat.

Apparently he had for the moment forgotten

that there was never much colour in Pollyooly's clear, pale cheeks, save on those rare occasions when she blushed.

"Very well; we'll make it twenty," said the lawyer in a tone of the bitterest pain.

Pollyooly smiled like a contented angel.

CHAPTER III

POLLYOOLY VINDICATES HER PERSONAL HUMAN DIGNITY

AS he devoured his bacon next morning the Honourable John Ruffin gazed at the angel face of Pollyooly with a warmer approval than ever.

Presently he said, "By the way, Mrs Bridè, in the stress and turmoil of our negotiations I forgot to congratulate you on the readiness and resource you displayed yesterday morning."

"Yes, sir," said Pollyooly in polite but somewhat doubtful assent, for she did not know with any exactitude what either readiness or resource was.

"Yes; you screamed," said the Honourable John Ruffin. "You screamed splendidly."

"Yes, sir," said Pollyooly in a somewhat perplexed tone, for she had never associated a scream with any kind of splendour.

"Ah, I see that you don't appreciate the admirable nature of your own action. It must have been instinctive," he said gravely; then he added in his most impressive tone, "But remember, Pollyooly,

that a woman's chief armour is her scream—never forget that."

"No, sir," said Pollyooly, properly impressed.

"A woman's chief weapon of offence is her tears—and deucedly offensive they are. Her chief armour is her scream. Bear that in mind always; and the world will hold no terrors for you," he said again impressively.

"Yes, sir," said Pollyooly.

The Honourable John Ruffin returned to his bacon with the profound air of satisfaction of a sage who has just conferred upon the world a boon of priceless wisdom.

Pollyooly carried an armful of scattered garments into his bedroom, pondering his words of wisdom with extreme gravity.

The next morning there came to Mr Gedge-Tomkins, her cheque for twenty pounds from Mr Montague Fitzgerald.

When she brought in his breakfast, he took the cheque out of its envelope and regarded her sombrely; then he said in gloomy tones, "Here's your cheque for twenty pounds from that money-lending rascal. What are you going to do with it?"

Pollyooly looked at the slip of paper in some bewilderment, for it was probably the first time in her life she had ever given any attention to a cheque, if indeed she had ever seen one before.

"Is it—is it twenty pounds, sir?" she said.

"Yes; it's an open cheque, and if you take it to the City of London Bank, they will give you twenty pounds for it. It's a great deal of money for a child like you to have; and if you'd been properly brought up, you'd have an account with the Post Office Savings Bank, and put it into it," he said gloomily.

"I was properly brought up!" cried Pollyooly with some heat. "Mrs Brown always says that Aunt Hannah brought me up ever so properly. And I have a Post Office Savings Bank book."

"Oh, you have, have you?" said Mr Gedge-Tomkins in a tone of considerable surprise, for he still cherished his unfavourable opinion of Pollyooly's character.

"And there's more than two pounds in it," said Pollyooly.

"Um. Well, if you pay that cheque into it, you'll have more than twenty-two pounds in it," he said with a complete freedom from gloom. "I'll tell you what, I'll go with you to the Post Office on my way to the Courts and see you pay it in. They may be rather surprised that so young a child should pay so large a cheque as twenty pounds."

"Thank you, sir," said Pollyooly.

Pollyooly fetched her bank book and trotted along beside the far-striding Mr Gedge-Tomkins

to the Post Office. He explained to her that she had to endorse the cheque by writing her name on the back of it, and saw it safely paid in. Pollyooly thanked him politely, and returned to the Temple with the air of a plutocrat. Mr Montague Fitzgerald had lifted the burden from her spirit. Of the many actions of his busy life few were noble, more were in the High Court; and it is to be regretted that he did Pollyooly this service with such a bitter reluctance. He had written the cheque with tears in his eyes.

Had she known this, it is to be doubted that Pollyooly would have been deeply moved; she was too full of joy at her relief from her worst care: Should her work suddenly cease, the Post Office Savings Bank stood as a firm barrier between the Lump and the Workhouse for the best part of a year; one British Institution counteracted another. She moved about the world a blither creature.

It was perhaps owing to this blitheness that one afternoon, some ten days later, she lapsed for a few minutes from the high dignity she had prescribed for herself as fitting the housekeeper of the Honourable John Ruffin. It was a high and fine dignity: she always walked sedately now; she even walked up Alsatia without the truculent swagger she had been wont to assume; when she went to visit Mrs Brown; she shunned her old Alsatian

acquaintances; she never ran nowadays save when she forgot herself.

After their dinner that afternoon she mended a rent in the Lump's frock with neatness and expedition, for not only had she passed at Muttie Deeping School the Seven Standards Great Britain sets before it's young, but also she had occupied a high place in a sewing-class. Then they sallied forth to take the air in the gardens on the Thames Embankment.

But as they went out of the Tudor Street Gate, the dulcet strains of a barrel-organ fell on their ears; and half-way up Alsatia they saw the usual far-too-intelligent-to-work alien grinding out the Opera of the Poor. The music was too much for Pollyooly's dignity; it was too much for her years. She gave the Lump into the care of a somewhat black Alsatian maiden, and joined the dancing children.

She danced lightly, with a natural grace and a delightful abandon. She danced with a spirit so entranced that she did not notice the presence of the big man with the sombrero hat and the mop of curls, till she stopped to take breath and he was patting her on the back.

"What did I tell you, James?" he cried in a ringing, sonorous voice to the slight, keen-eyed man who was with him. "I have always said that the fairies have migrated to the slums because

only there can they find that atmosphere of the vivid joy of life in which alone they can live."

"Vivid joy of grandmother!" said Mr James unsympathetically.

"But here—here in Albatia we have seen a fairy dance," cried the big man with a loudness little short of roaring.

"You idealists!" said Mr James in a scoffing tone.

"You moderns! You disgusting moderns!" cried the big man indignantly. "What's your name, little girl?"

"Pollyooly, sir," said Pollyooly, dropping a curtsy, like the well-mannered child she was; and she took the Lump's hand.

"Pollyooly the Queen of the slum fairies," said the big man. "Well, I want a model for a set of fairy stories I'm illustrating; and you're the very model I want. Will you sit for me? You understand? I want to draw you."

"Would it take long, sir?" said Pollyooly, politely ready to oblige him.

"Three hours a day for about a month. I'll pay you a shilling an hour."

Pollyooly's eyes sparkled; the very mines of Golconda opened before them. Then her face fell; and she said, "But I have to look after the Lump—my little brother here."

"Bring him with you; he can play about the

studio—it's large enough," said the big man ; and he stooped and looked at him. " By Jove, it's a cherub—a genuine cherub. Look, James : did you ever see a finer cherub ? Look at his dimples," he cried.

" Why, he's clean ! " said Mr James with the liveliest surprise.

" The Lump's always clean, sir," said Pollyooly with some heat.

" There ! He's always clean," cried the big man. " Will you be my model, little girl ? "

Pollyooly considered for a moment : here was wealth indeed. Then she said loyally, " I could do it in the afternoon without interfering with my work, if Mr Ruffin would let me ; but I should have to ask him."

" Bother Mr Ruffin ! " cried the big man with tremendous impatience.

" Mr Ruffin won't say ' no,' when he learns that it's eighteen shillings a week. He'll drown—in floods of unexpected beer," said Mr James.

" No : he wouldn't ! He's a gentleman. He lives in the Temple. I'm his housekeeper ; and he doesn't drink beer. It isn't good enough for him," said Pollyooly with indignant heat.

" Oh, come : beer is good enough for any man," said the big man in a pained tone.

" It must be our friend the Honourable John," said Mr James.

"So it must," said the big man. "But come along little girl, let's go and have a drink and arrange things."

"You can't take these children into a pub," said Mr James.

"That's it! That's it!" cried the big man furiously. "I find a fairy dancing in a slum; and I can't take her into a public-house to stand her a drink. What a country!"

"Better come to the Honourable John's rooms; and settle it with him," said Mr James.

"He won't be in yet. He doesn't come in from the Law Courts till four; and then he has his tea and goes out again," said Pollyooly.

"Well, we'll call at four," said the big man.

"And please, I'd rather you didn't say you saw me dancing to that organ. Mr Ruffin mightn't think it dignified; and I'm his housekeeper," said Pollyooly a little anxiously.

"There's a conspiracy! A conspiracy for the repression of fairies! I have always thought it; and now I know it. It's as plain as a pikestaff," roared the big man. "Ruffin is in it. He's the head of it. I've always suspected him. He represses fairies."

"All right, little girl. Your secret shall be preserved," said Mr James. "Come on, Vance: where shall we go for an hour?"

"I must have beer. I have been thrilled to the

depths of my being joy this amazing discovery. I must have lots of beer," cried the big man.

"All right. Only come along. You're collecting a crowd," said Mr James, thrusting an arm through his and dragging him away.

Pollyooly took the Lump for his airing, and with an eager eye on the face of Big Ben, in the Clock Tower up the river, she dreamed the dreams of Alnaschar.

At a few minutes to four she returned to the Temple; and at four she admitted the big man and Mr James into the chambers of the Honourable John Ruffin. Almost on their heels came the Honourable John Ruffin himself; and she followed him into his sitting-room.

At the sight of the big man he assumed swiftly a defensive air, raised his hand, and said sternly, "Now, do not gush upon me, Vance. I will not have it. An Englishman's house is his castle. Be moderate—be sane."

"Gush? I never gush!" roared the big man indignantly. "I have come for this little girl—for Pollyooly."

"You won't get her," said the Honourable John Ruffin with curt decision.

"I don't want her," said the big man. "At least I don't want to take her away from you. I want her to sit to me. I'm illustrating a set of fairy stories; and I must have her. She must sit

for me. She's the one model in London—in England—in the world."

His voice rose to a bellow beside which the most wrathful trumpeting of Mr Gedge-Tomkins would have sounded but as the cooing of a dove.

"An artist's model?" said the Honourable John Ruffin looking at Pollyooly with a pained air. "I once obliged a friend by sitting as model for a Roman patrician watching a gladiatorial show—a disreputable occupation—and I found it uncommonly dull and stiffening."

"Please, sir: it's a shilling an hour," said Pollyooly anxiously.

"Wealth—wealth beyond the dreams of avarice," said the Honourable John Ruffin smiling at her. "You can do as you like, Mrs Bride."

"Thank you, sir," said Pollyooly with shining eyes.

"But I observe that Mr Vance calls you 'Pollyooly,' he went on in a tone of cold disapproval. "This is to be too familiar on so short an acquaintance. We cannot have that kind of thing. These artists are presumptuous fellows, Mrs Bride. You must insist on being treated respectfully; the dignity of your position as my housekeeper demands it."

"Yes, sir," said Pollyooly.

"Understand then, Vance, that to you Pollyooly is 'Mrs Bride.' In my unbending moments

I may call her Pollyooly; but you—never. The artist must keep his place,” said the Honourable John Ruffin with an air of splendid hauteur.

“You swells! The airs you give yourselves!” roared Hilary Vance.

“I am one of the sixty thousand living Britons with Plantagenet blood in my veins; and we will now have tea,” said the Honourable John Ruffin.

Over their tea they discussed the matter of Pollyooly’s hours, and decided that from three to six she should sit to Hilary Vance. He instructed her very earnestly to come in the frock she was wearing and not in her best.

At two o’clock the next afternoon therefore she was at the Temple station, very eager to begin earning a shilling an hour. She took a half return ticket to Chelsea for herself, since the ingrained frugality of her mind impelled her to reckon herself under eleven for purposes of travelling by rail.

Hilary Vance welcomed her with loud enthusiasm to a large and lofty studio, of which the chief furniture was a line of canvases, ranged three and four deep with their faces to the wall along two sides of the room.

Pollyooly was soon posed in the required fairy-like attitude on a chair on a little dais at the end of the room; Hilary Vance fell to work; and the Lump, deserting the maneless, but wooden, horse which Pollyooly had brought for his entertainment,

proceeded on a toddling tour of examination round this new and spacious chamber. He soon discovered that on the other side of the canvases were bright colours, and turned several of them over. Unfortunately each, like the floor and everything else in the studio, was covered with a thick layer of black dust; and as she saw him grow grimmer and grimmer, an expression of acute anguish deepened and deepened on Pollyooly's face.

At last Hilary Vance perceived it and said, "What's the matter, Pollyooly? Why are you unhappy?"

"Oh, sir, it is so dirty," said Pollyooly.

"What is so dirty?" said Hilary Vance, in a tone of lively surprise.

"Everything," said Pollyooly.

Hilary Vance looked round the studio and the expression of surprise deepened on his face: "So it is," he said. "Curious—I never noticed it. Mrs Thomas must neglect it."

"I expect she's an old woman who drinks," said Pollyooly, thoughtfully, but with grave conviction.

"Now, that's an admirable description of Mrs Thomas!" cried Hilary Vance, in even greater surprise. "How on earth did you guess it?"

"They're generally like that, sir," said Pollyooly, in the tone of one who has had wide experience. "Can I clean it after I've done sitting?"

"Robin Goodfellow and Titania in one," said Hilary Vance, in a hushed voice. "Amazing! How unfortunate it is that Ruffin has already engaged you as his housekeeper! I have missed a chance—a great chance. If ever you find yourself unable to tolerate his unbearable airs of the aristocrat, come to me. Come at once."

"I shan't ever want to leave Mr Ruffin, sir," said Pollyooly, firmly.

"You can never tell. I find those airs very wearing; and when you do, come to me."

"Yes, sir. Thank you, sir. And may I clean this room?" said Pollyooly, still heavily oppressed by its dirtiness.

"You shall," said Hilary Vance.

Soon after four he stopped working; Pollyooly washed the Lump in the bedroom adjoining the studio; and they had tea, a splendid tea of cakes and milk. Over it Hilary Vance returned to his theory that the fairies had migrated to the slums, and discoursed on it with a flamboyant enthusiasm which impressed but did not convince Pollyooly.

Alsatia had afforded her no evidence whatever of the truth of his theory.

After tea he worked again till a quarter to six; then he paid Pollyooly, went out, and left the studio to her ministrations.

She found brooms and brushes and dusters, all very dirty, in the very dirty little kitchen; and she was glad that Hilary Vance had required her to sit to him in her blue print working-frock. She swept and dusted with an eager vigour till half-past seven. For the last hour of her toil the Lump slept on Hilary Vance's bed.

When she had done she wrote a note to the artist, and set it in the mantel-piece. It ran:

"Please Mr Vance the rugs ought to be taken outside and shook and the floor scrubbed."

Then, filled with the gratifying sense of having accomplished a meritorious task, she conveyed the sleepy Lump home.

The next afternoon Hilary Vance welcomed her buoyantly, his large face shining richly with a warm satisfaction.

"I had to be very firm with Mrs Thomas; and I was," he cried with beaming pride. "The memory of your pained face, Pollyooly, nerved me to the manly effort; it spurred me on to the stern expression of human dignity. The woman collapsed before it—collapsed utterly. Do you always exercise this stimulating effect on human character?"

"Yes, sir. Thank you, sir," said Pollyooly, as ever polite before the incomprehensible.

The floor was still wet (far too wet, Pollyooly thought) from its scrubbing; the rugs had gone

to the carpet-beaters, and Pollyooly sat and watched the exploring Lump wander about the transformed studio, in peace. He could no longer acquire grime. For much of the afternoon Hilary Vance talked on in tones of triumph about his masterly handling of Mrs Thomas; and that evening, at the end of her sitting he gave Pollyooly eight shillings instead of three.

Pollyooly looked at the extra five shillings with her brow knitted in a perplexed frown and said, "Please, sir, you've given me too much."

"No: three shillings for sitting and five for cleaning," said Hilary Vance.

"Oh, but five shillings is ever so much too much for a little bit of work like that!" said Pollyooly.

"Not at all!" cried Hilary Vance. "Five shillings is really too little. There's not only the actual work; there's the invaluable moral effect on my character. I have learnt that I can be firm with a woman. I am another, stronger man."

Against this view of her services Pollyooly could urge nothing. She did not know what to urge, since she had very little understanding of what she had done. She put the eight shillings in her pocket and thanked him warmly.

Henceforward she came every day at three to his

studio, and every morning she added to the Savings Bank barrier between the Lump and the Workhouse. Sometimes when she came she found Hilary Vance still working with another model, of the name of Ermyntude, his morning model. She was a young woman of masterful air, a vinegary aspect, a high colour, and a most deplorable squint. Always she wore an execrable feathered hat even more deplorable than her squint. Hilary Vance was not using her as a model for the illustrations of the set of fairy stories. She posed to him for the illustrations of a very different set of stories, realistic slum stories. Either she ignored Pollyooly altogether, or gave herself insufferable airs. Pollyooly did not like her at all; she could not understand the satisfaction Hilary Vance drew from her; he hardly ever failed to say in tones of the warmest approval that she was an absolutely perfect type.

Sometimes a friend of Hilary Vance would come in and talk to him as he worked; but for the most part, Pollyooly sat for hour after hour in a quiet, untiring content. Sometimes Hilary Vance would ask her what she thought about. Sometimes she could tell him; sometimes she could not. She thought about so many things. Often she thought about her swelling bank account.

Then one afternoon he was surprised to observe a deep frown on her usually so serene brow.

"Hullo! Whatever's the matter? What are you thinking about, Pollyooly?" he cried in great surprise. "I was getting into the way of believing you to be the serene and ageless fairy, utterly free from all the cares which harass us common mortals. What is it? I must know. I insist on knowing."

Pollyooly flushed faintly and said, "Please, sir, it's Henry Wiggins. He—he bothers me."

"Who is Henry Wiggins? How dare he bother you? What does he do?" cried Hilary Vance, in a terrible voice.

"Please, sir, he's a little boy who lives in the house we used to live in with Aunt Hannah. And whenever he sees me go out with the Lump he follows us and shouts 'Ginger' at me because my hair is red."

"Monstrous! Monstrous!" cried Hilary Vance. "Why don't you smack him—hard?"

"I used to, sir," said Pollyooly, in a tone of mournful regret. "But I can't do it any longer now that I'm Mr Ruffin's housekeeper."

"And why not?" cried Mr Hilary Vance. "Who prevents you?"

"It's a position of dignity, sir. Mr Ruffin said it was," said Pollyooly, in an explanatory tone. "And it wouldn't do for me to smack Henry Wiggins now. Housekeepers aren't supposed to. I'm sure they're not."

Hilary Vance looked at her sadly and shook his head gloomily, "I'm afraid that association with that young aristocrat is corrupting you, Pollyooly."

"I'm sure it isn't!" said Pollyooly, in her indignant heat forgetting to be polite and say "sir."

"I'm a socialist myself; and I'm thankful to say that I grow more and more class-conscious every day," said Hilary Vance, still gloomily. "But if you feel it due to your personal human dignity to smack Henry Wiggins, you oughtn't to let your official dignity stand in your way."

"No, sir," said Pollyooly, politely.

"The vindication of one's personal human dignity is the most important thing in life. You must resign!" he roared, warming to a sudden enthusiasm.

"What's that, sir?" said Pollyooly calmly.

She had grown used to his roaring enthusiasms. They no longer ruffled her serenity.

"You must give up being the Honourable John's housekeeper," he roared.

"Oh, I couldn't do that!" cried Pollyooly, startled. "How should we live, the Lump and me?"

"You — must — vindicate — your — personal — human — dignity!" roared Hilary Vance.

He had laid down his pencil in order to punctuate each word by slapping his right hand down on his left. The action and the noise produced emphasis.

Pollyooly gazed at him with calm eyes.

"You will find other work," he roared on a more gentle note. "I cannot employ you myself because you will have left the service of John Ruffin by my advice; and it would not be friendly of me. The action would be open to misconstruction. But you will find other work—you are sure to."

Pollyooly shook her head: "It would be very hard to do, sir," she said with the conviction born of experience. Then she added a tone of finality, "Besides, it isn't only that—there's Mr Ruffin's bacon."

"Bacon! Mr Ruffin's bacon! What is bacon when personal human dignity is at stake?" roared Hilary Vance, louder than ever.

"No one but me can cook it just as he likes it," said Pollyooly.

Hilary Vance raged and stormed for a while, for personal human dignity bulked enormous in his mind at the moment; but he could not dislodge Pollyooly from her inexpugnable position behind the bacon of the Honourable John Ruffin. He went on with his work growling, at first loudly, then more quietly.

Pollyooly resumed her thoughtful meditation on Henry Wiggins.

Presently her face brightened.

"What is it? Have you decided to resign?" said Hilary Vance, eagerly.

"No, sir. But I think I can see how to do it. Next time I come across Henry Wiggins, I'll pretend I'm not Mr Ruffin's housekeeper for a bit—just till I've smacked him," said Pollyooly, with an angel smile.

Hilary Vance stared at her; then he groaned, "Compromise—dastardly compromise! Oh, woman—woman!"

Pollyooly was not one to let grass grow under her feet, little likely as it was to make the attempt in the paved and macadamised King's Bench Walk; and that very evening she sallied forth to the encounter with Henry Wiggins.

As she had hoped, he was vociferous among his comrades in Alsatia, and he caught sight of her as she passed very slowly across the bottom of it.

With a shrill yell of "Ginger!" he dashed in pursuit.

Pollyooly quickened her steps, and she was just turning the corner of Temple Chambers, that short quiet, and empty street leading to the Thames Embankment, as Henry emerged from Alsatia.

He dashed after her with another yell of

"Ginger!" and as he came round the corner, he saw her running down the street. Flight—flight on the part of Pollyooly—seemed too good to be true; and the street echoed and re-echoed to his yells of "Ginger!",

She turned the right-hand corner on to the Embankment. He bolted round it, and fetched up with a jerk that nearly brought both of them to the ground as the waiting Pollyooly sprang and gripped him by the hair.

He let out a yell of horrified surprise; and then the smacks came with all the righteous force of Pollyooly's vengeful arm. He kicked but feebly at her shins; but his howls of repentance were of the piercing kind which comes from the heart.

Pollyooly jerked his hair and smacked, and jerked and smacked till she could smack no more.

Then she flung the remorseful boy from her and said, "That will teach you to call me 'Ginger,' Henry Wiggins."

She spoke with a certain lack of accuracy; but Henry Wiggins understood her. He would not call her "Ginger" for many days; and after that he would only call her "Ginger" from a safe distance. He would never again be lured to headlong pursuit.

Pollyooly walked down the Thames Embank-

HER PERSONAL HUMAN DIGNITY 107

ment with the truculent swagger of the avenger who has vindicated his personal human dignity. But as she turned into the Temple her gait suddenly changed. It had become the gait of the perfect housekeeper. She had ceased pretending.

CHAPTER IV

THE SQUARING OF 'ERMYNTRUDE

THE next afternoon the mind of Hilary Vance was full of another matter; and he did not remember the personal human dignity of Pollyooly till he had been working for nearly an hour.

Then he said abruptly, "Ha! What about Henry Wiggins?"

"It's all right, sir. He won't bother me any more—at least not for a long time," said Pollyooly, cheerfully.

"Did you compromise?" said Hilary Vance, eagerly.

"I pretended; and I smacked him," said Pollyooly, in a tone of quiet joy.

Hilary Vance groaned heavily and went on with his work.

At a quarter past four he stopped working, and Pollyooly rose from her chair, stretched herself, and took the stiffness out of her legs with three or four little kicks. She was just stepping off the dais when Mr James entered.

"Ah, you're the very man I wanted to see,"

THE SQUARING OF ERMYNTRUDE 109

said Hilary Vance, joyfully. "I've got a magnificent idea."

"Then Heaven help you!" said Mr James, with a touch of dismay in his tone.

"I'm going to try the anæsthetic revelation," said Hilary Vance, unperturbed. There was even a note of pride in his tone.

"And what may that be?" said Mr James.

"You take gas—ordinary dentist's gas—mixed with a large proportion of air; and without your losing consciousness, the walls of the flesh vanish, you sally forth into the Empyrean, and see visions. I shall see colours undreamed of by the artist and wonderful beings, the amazing denizens of the sky," said Hilary Vance, warming to enthusiasm.

"You will. You will see scarlet snakes and purple opossums," said Mr James.

"Purple opossums—glorious!" said Hilary Vance, joyfully. "You will come with me?"

"I don't think gas is exactly what you want, Hilary," said Mr James, thoughtfully.

"My mind is made up. It's no use your trying to stop me. Will you come?" said Hilary Vance, firmly.

"I suppose I must," said Mr James, gloomily. "Somebody must try to help you to make as little of a fool of yourself as possible. All my leisure seems to be spent in saving you from the consequences of your follies."

"You are so unsympathetic," said Hilary Vance, somewhat bitterly.

"I'm Art's martyr; you can't expect me to like it," said Mr James. "Let's have tea."

Pollyooly made the tea and laid the table. She and the Lump sat down to it, as did Mr James. Hilary Vance took his walking up and down the studio. He was too full of nervous energy to sit down save when he was working.

"Well, let's hear about this new idiocy," said Mr James, with the gloomy frankness of a friend. "I'll have three lumps in my tea to-day, Pollyooly, please. My bitter lot needs sweetening."

"Idiocy! It's no idiocy!" cried Hilary Vance, indignantly. "I read about it in William James's 'Varieties of Religious Experience'; and when I went to my dentist yesterday, I talked to him about it. I got him interested in it."

"He's stopped three of your teeth; he ought to know you better," Mr James complained.

"He agreed that if I'd take the gas, he'd give it to me."

"He ought to be ashamed of himself," said Mr James, with conviction.

"Not a bit of it!" cried Hilary Vance. "If an ordinary man under its influence sees visions, think of what I shall see!"

"I've told you what you'll see," said Mr James, coldly. "At what time do you commit this folly?"

"In the evening. I have to take the gas fasting of course; so I shan't have any dinner. You'd better meet me at the Gambrinus at a quarter to nine," said Hilary Vance.

Mr James agreed; and for the rest of tea Hilary Vance talked with eloquent enthusiasm of the visions he was going to see. When they had finished, Pollyooly cleared the table and went back to her seat on the dais. Mr James rose and bade them good-bye.

At the door he paused and said in a very bitter tone, "I do assure you, Hilary—on my word of honour—that gas is the very last thing you need."

"Oh, get out! Get out!" said Hilary Vance.

Mr James got out.

The next afternoon Pollyooly observed that Mr Hilary Vance was enjoying an uncommon lightness of spirit. He sang, or to be exact he bellowed heartily, though with little regard to time or tune, over his work. He bubbled over with laughter. Then there came a knock at the front door; he went to it, and ushered Ermyntrude into the studio.

She came in bridling, glanced with contemptuous indifference at Pollyooly and the Lump, and said in a mincing, languishing voice: "O Hilary, why ever didn't you come this mornin' to tyke me to choose my engygement ring as you said you would.

I didn't expect you to be like this, when it was only last night you asked me to be yours."

Mr Hilary Vance looked at her blankly, opened his mouth, and gasped, as only a big man can gasp: "Last night? Asked you to be mine?" he said, in a blank consternation.

"Last night as ever was," simpered Ermyntrode with a fond smile which brought out the cold perspiration in beads on the artist's forehead.

"I—I—wasn't myself last night," he stammered.

"Now don't say as you'd bin drinkin', 'ilary——"

"Of course I hadn't been drinking! I never drink!" cried Hilary Vance, indignantly. "At least I never drink too much," he added, in a gentler voice.

"No: you was as sober as a judge. I never seed you so serious. An' when you asked me to be yours, I was that taken aback you could 'ave knocked me down wiv a feather," said Ermyntrode; and she bridled again in a way to make the blood run cold.

Hilary Vance grasped his abundant, but crinkly, curls with both hands, and cried in a tone of horror, "I really asked you to be mine?"

"Before witnesses, 'ilary. Not but what I'd bin expectin' it—for months—ever since I sat to you for them first East-end picthoors, and you paid me all them attentions. They was most marked."

"You're mistaken, Ermyntrude—quite mistaken. I never paid you any attentions!" cried Hilary Vance, in a tone of anguished protest.

"Ho, yas; you did," said Ermyntrude, very firmly. "They began with haffability; an' then you giv' me flowers an' took me to music 'alls. Why, you give me this 'at."

"No! I never gave you that hat!" cried Hilary Vance, in a sudden bellow of protest.

"Well, you giv' me the money for it. It's the syme thing," said Ermyntrude, with unabated firmness.

"Yes; I told you to buy a hat—the hat of your choice. I wanted to draw you in it. But I never bought that hat—never! I will not endure the aspersion!" bellowed Hilary Vance.

"Well, I've bin expectin' you to propose ever since; an' last night you proposed proper—before witnesses," said Ermyntrude, returning to her main position.

"I couldn't have done it—I couldn't," muttered Hilary Vance, in the voice of a broken man; and on his face rested a vast dismay.

"You're never goin' to be dis//onourable as to go an' deny it!" cried Ermyntrude shrilly.

"I wasn't myself," groaned Hilary Vance.

"Oh, 'ilary, 'ow can you sye it, when I ses to Gwendolen Briggs as I'd never seen you so serious?" cried Ermyntrude, yet more shrilly.

"An' you was talkin' somethin' wunnerful all the time, callin' me your slum princess—not but what I'd 'ave yer ter know I live in the Wandsworth Road, a most respectable nyeghber'ood. An' when we came back 'ere, you harsked me to nyme the dye."

"Came back here? Asked you to name the day?" wailed Hilary Vance.

"You're never goin' to deny it, when Gwendolen Briggs and a friend of 'er's, nymed George Walker, 'eard you sye it—to sye nothink of Mr Jymes."

"If half London heard me say it, what's the good of my denying it?" cried Hilary Vance, in a tone of utter despair.

"I knew you wouldn't. You ain't one of them as 'ud plye fast an' loose with a young lydy. But I did expeck you to receive me diferent from this—warmer like," said Ermyntrude in a softer, more alluring voice; and she sidled towards him, with appealing eyes, appealing to opposite corners of the room.

Hilary Vance backed hastily away from her, and said faintly, "The matter has come as a surprise to me. My memories of last night are so confused."

"Well, you'd better get them clear, 'ilary. My lawyer says as 'ow a promise of marriage given before witness is binding," said Ermyntrude with a sudden sternness.

"Your lawyer?" cried Hilary Vance.

THE SQUARING OF ERMYNTRUDE 115

"Well, you promised to tyke me out ter buy the engygement ring; an' when you didn't come, I went to see my lawyer; an' 'e tells me that it's horl ryght," said Ermyntrude, in a tone of cold menace.

"All right? Oh, heavens!" cried Hilary Vance; and he plunged his hands into his pockets, and walked heavily up and down the room with a supernal gloom on his face. Now and again he groaned.

Ermyntrude sat down in a chair and watched him with the cold eye of a proprietor. At the end of three minutes she said in a yet more threatening tone: "What are you goin' on like this for, 'ilary? I 'ope as 'ow you're goin' to beyyve like a man of Honour." She laid uncommon stress on the "h" in honour.

"I must think it over. . . . I must think it over. . . . Go now. . . . There's a good girl . . . go," said Hilary Vance, in a shaky voice.

Ermyntrude rose with an air of great dignity: "I don't understand your manner, 'ilary," she said, with stern coldness, "But since you harsks me, I'll leave you to think it hover. But you think it hover right. Don't you go tryin' to plye no tricks on me, 'ilary, for the lor is the lor. Good hafternoon."

She left the room with extraordinary dignity, but rather spoiled a fine exit by banging the door

after her. Hilary Vance sank into a creaking chair, buried his face in his hands, and groaned, "Good heavens, Pollyooly, what have I done?"

"I don't know, sir," said Pollyooly, politely. "Don't you want to marry her?"

"Marry that little cat? No!" bellowed Hilary Vance, spurred by the suggestion to his pristine vigour.

Pollyooly reflected carefully for a minute or two; then she said with the air of a sage: "Then I don't think you'd better, sir. I don't think she'd make a comfortable wife."

"Comfortable wife! She'd blight me! She'd blast every inspiration! That girl has the nature of a hyena! I know it—I'm sure of it!" bellowed Hilary Vance, with immense conviction.

"Then you mustn't marry her, sir," said Pollyooly.

"But what am I to do?" cried Hilary Vance.

Pollyooly thought again; then she said, "I should go on with my work, sir. Then you won't think about it."

Hilary Vance raved that he would think about it, that he would always think of it—till his dying day, that his artistic powers were forever destroyed, the spring of imagination was dried up in him, that he would never be able to work again.

Undoubtedly he could not work at the moment.

He tried to carry out Pollyooly's suggestion in the hope that work might make him feel better ; but he flung down his pencil and again betook himself to his raving. Pollyooly listened to him and watched him with respectful but somewhat uncomprehending sympathy. His emotion to her childish mind seemed extravagant : marriage with Ermyntrude could not matter as much as all that to anyone. Also his face interested her very much : thanks to it's size, it expressed such a large quantity of any emotion he chanced to be feeling.

At tea, with the Lump on his knee, he was calmer but inconceivably bitter on the subject of the pitfalls which lie in the path of the artist. Under the stress of emotion he ate enormously.

Then came Mr James.

At the sight of him Hilary Vance sprang to his feet and bellowed with a vast reproachfulness, " How could you let me ? You call yourself my friend : how could you let me ? "

" Have you repented already ? " said Mr James, coolly, to all seeming unmoved by his friend's heart and ear-rending tone.

" Repented ? I knew nothing about it. Last night was a blank to me, save for some glorious visions. Then that girl—my model—Ermyntrude came and told me that I had proposed marriage to her."

Mr James laughed a hearty, but unsympathetic,

laugh, and said : " You were extraordinarily funny last night. I've never known you more romantic. And all the while you were making an egregious fool of yourself, you were more ineffably solemn than Solomon in all his glory. Ermyntrode's friends will be able to swear conscientiously to the entire seriousness of your proposal of marriage."

" Why didn't you stop me ? You call yourself my friend," bellowed Hilary Vance.

" Stop you ? Why, you were superb ! I wouldn't have stopped you for the world. From the endearments you lavished on the young lady I gathered that your vocabulary is the largest an impassioned lover ever possessed. Stop you ? Check the idealist in his flights ? Never ! Besides, you would fill yourself up with that gas. By Jove, it did stimulate your imagination ! There was no doubt about that ! "

" Oh, what a fool I must have been ! " groaned Hilary Vance, with immense conviction. " If I marry this girl my life is blighted."

" It certainly is. But you're not going to be such a fool as to marry her," said Mr James.

" Her lawyer says I am," said Hilary Vance, in a tone of despair.

" Her lawyer ? " said Mr James, in some surprise.

" Yes ; she's been to her lawyer ; and he says she has a tremendous case against me—overwhelming. It's not only last night, but I have

given her flowers, and I took her to music halls," moaned Hilary Vance.

Mr James whistled softly ; then he said, " What on earth did you do that for ? "

" She's a type—a wonderful type—the soul of the slums," said Hilary Vance, suddenly awaking to his natural enthusiasm.

" But it must have bored you to extinction," said Mr James, with conviction.

" Oh, it did. But how could I draw the people of the slums without knowing their soul I'm an artist, James—a conscientious artist," said Hilary Vance, warmly.

" And now you'll be a conscientious defendant in a breach of promise case," said Mr James.

" Horrible ! Horrible ! Thank Heaven the river is at hand ! " cried Hilary Vance.

" If you go on talking about suicide, whenever you're in one of your messes, one of these days you'll forget yourself and go and commit it," said Mr James, coldly.

" Well, what am I to do ? " What else is there but the river ? " cried Hilary Vance, getting a firm grip on his abundant hair.

" Well, either you must marry Ermyntrude, or square her. That's as plain as a pikestaff," said Mr James.

" She shall be squared ! " cried Hilary Vance, with an heroic air. Then his face fell ; and he

added, "Am I justified? Suppose the poor girl really loves me. You say I was impassioned; and when I am impassioned——"

"Oh, get out!" said Mr James, in a tone of some exasperation.

"No, no! It's no good saying 'Get out!' I know what I am when I'm impassioned—I know the effect—the female heart——"

"Oh, drop the female heart!" said Mr James, in a tone of ferocity. "Let's keep to the question of squaring. I expect it's going to cost you fifty pounds at least."

Hilary Vance's face fell: "Fifty pounds?" he said in a tone of humiliation. "Do you really think that fifty pounds—a paltry fifty pounds—would really compensate her for the loss of me?"

"Knowing you as I do, and speaking from my heart, I can honestly say that a paltry fifty shillings would amply compensate any woman for the loss of you," said Mr James, with intense but unkind conviction. "What I'm wondering is how the dickens you'll raise fifty pounds."

"Well, as a matter of fact, I have an uncle—a rich uncle," said Hilary Vance, in a tone of hesitation. "And he has said to me two or three times, 'When you get into an infernal mess with a woman, Hilary, you come straight to me. I'd rather pay than acquire the niece by marriage

you're likely to provide.' • He has no' manners ; and his soul is cramped."

"That's more than his brain seems to be," said Mr James, in a tone of relief. "I think I should like your uncle."

"I should think it very likely. He has the same small head and small features as you have," said Hilary Vance.

"My features are large enough for all practical purposes," said Mr James, tartly. "Well, Ermyntitude has got to be squared ; and your uncle is the man to provide the means of squaring her."

They discussed the necessity of an early visit to Hilary Vance's uncle ; and Mr James insisted on accompanying him, the artist, since he would have to do the actual squaring. It is not unlikely that he looked to derive instruction and entertainment from the interview between uncle and nephew.

Pollyooly had listened to their talk with the liveliest interest ; and she had been deeply impressed by that part of it which dealt with the squaring of Ermyntitude. To her child's mind it conveyed very clearly the idea that in the process Ermyntitude would lose her somewhat distressing angularity and assume the simpler contours of a gate-post.

For the next few days Hilary Vance remained deeply depressed by the plight into which his indu-

gence in the anæsthetic revelation had brought him. He sighed and groaned heavily for at least ten minutes every afternoon before he became absorbed in his work. Pollyooly pitied him; and all the while she wondered what Ermyntrude would look like when she had been smoothed and compressed. She wondered too whether the process would be very painful. She was too well-mannered to ask, for the preconnubial difficulties of Mr Hilary Vance were no business of hers.

She was so much distressed by the artist's suffering however that after some thought she resolved to consult the Honourable John Ruffin in the matter, for she had the highest opinion of his wisdom. As he ate his breakfast one morning, she told him the story of Ermyntrude and the artist.

Seeing her gravity, he heard her gravely, and questioned her gravely; then he said: "A very sad case, and one not unparalleled in my own personal experience. Only the lady in my case adorned the second row of the Gaiety chorus, claimed to be the daughter of a Post-Captain on active service, and, I assure you, never missed an aitch. Moreover, she did not squint. In fact, she would have made a wife anyone might have been proud of; and I'm exceedingly thankful that I am not being proud of her now. But this Ermyntrude is quite another matter. James, his friend, is right: Ermyntrude must be squared.

THE SQUARING OF ERMYNTRUDE 123

"Yes, sir," said Pollyooly. She hesitated, and added, "Will they squeeze her square, sir?"

The Honourable John Ruffin gasped faintly and gazed at her earnestly. Then he said with infinite seriousness, "The process of squaring a young lady is a moral one, not a physical one. The idea is that Mr Vance has hurt the feelings of Ermyntude, and they can only be soothed by the payment of money. When they have been soothed, he and she will be square—that is, quits."

"Oh, I see, sir," said Pollyooly, flushing faintly to have made so foolish a mistake. Then she added firmly, "But it would be a pity to pay money to a girl like that."

"It would," said the Honourable John Ruffin, sadly. "But it will have to be."

On the Sunday the sun was shining very brightly and the longing for open green spaces came on the country soul of Pollyooly. In Hilary Vance's studio she had heard talk of Battersea Park, and reckless of extravagant tram-fares she resolved to take the Lump to it. As soon, therefore, as she had finished her work, she packed up some bread and butter, filled a bottle with milk, and set out.

They reached the park in less than an hour and at once ate their dinner on the turf of the first lawn they came to. Then they wandered about, resting when the need took them, enjoying the fresh air,

the sunshine, the flowers, and the glimpses of the shining river.

Then, as they came out of a side-path on to a shady lawn, the Lump extended a short and very round arm and said in a tone of deep, æsthetic satisfaction, "Pretty."

To Pollyooly's surprise he was pointing at the execrable feathered hat of Ermyltrude.

But whether or no that forlorn one had sought this approximately sylvan retreat with the intention of soothing her lacerated heart by communion with Nature, it was very plain that she was not alone with her sorrow. On the bench, by her side sat a loose-lipped, pasty-faced youth in a bowler hat; and his arm was round her slender waist.

Pollyooly drew back, unseen. She did not like the airs of Ermyltrude, and she had no desire to come under her greenish eye. She was not well enough versed in the laws which regulate in England the preconnubial period, to be aware that Ermyltrude was not behaving in a fashion appropriate to an aspirant to the large hand of Hilary Vance, but she was curious to see a little more of the lady and her comforter. Therefore she only withdrew the Lump to the covert of the bushes, sat down, and took him on to her lap. The Lump promptly went to sleep.

In the disquisitions on morality by which Hannah

Bride had been training her grand-niece, she had never chanced to touch on the wrongfulness of eaves-dropping so that Pollyooly was able to gratify her simple curiosity with an easy mind.

She was not only conveniently placed for seeing Ermyntrude but also for hearing her. The subject of Hilary Vance seemed, very naturally, to fill that young lady's mind; and all her talk ran on the sum she was going to extract from him. Both she and the young man spoke of that distinguished artist as "a fair ole juggins."

It seemed that Ermyntrude had been holding out for a hundred pounds; but Mr James, the plenipotentiary, had firmly refused to rise above fifty. Most of her talk was a recapitulation of the chief points in her conversations with Hilary Vance's unwavering friend. At intervals the young man whose name, Pollyooly gathered, was Alf, or Half, Brown, punctuated her talk with a smacking kiss; and Ermyntrude returned his kisses with an answering warmth.

Ignorant of the law on the matter as she was, Pollyooly felt that it was not right for an aspirant to the hand of Hilary Vance to kiss an Alf Brown; and she was somewhat shocked.

The enamoured pair talked and kissed for half an hour; then they rose to return to Wandsworth.

As they left the lawn, Alf Brown said with enthusiasm, "You touch the ole juggins for fifty

quid, Hermy; an' I'll marry yew on Wen'sdye for'tnyte as hever is ! ”

“ Ryght O ! O Alf, won't it be a little bit of horl ryght to git married with fifty quid to blew ! ” said the fond, but deceitful, Ermyntrude.

• “ I'd do it on a fiver, I'm that fond of yer ! ” said the impassioned Alf Brōwn. •

They departed to Wandsworth, leaving Pollyooly food for thought indeed ; and all the afternoon she pondered the question whether she ought to tell Mr Hilary Vance what she had scen. She felt that those kisses were wrong. But she had been taught, very strictly that tale-bearing was also wrong. She could not therefore see her duty plain ; and in the end she resolved to leave the matter open and act as circumstances bade her.

The next afternoon Hilary Vance seemed to have recovered his old, overflowing cheerfulness ; and she said nothing.

At four o'clock Mr James came ; and at once he said briskly, “ Well, have you got the squaring money ? ”

“ Yes,” said Hilary Vance ; and he went to the rickety bureau against the left wall of the studio and took from an inner drawer some bank-notes. •

Mr James took them, counted them, and said cheerfully, “ Ten fivers—that's right—it looks so much more than five tenners.”

Hilary Vance gazed at him thoughtfully ; and

a vast gloom slowly overspread his large, round face.

"It's all very well," he said heavily. "But I keep asking myself am I justified, James? I have raised hopes—high hopes—in a young girl's heart; and I am forcing her—yes; forcing her—to barter them for ten paltry five-pound notes. I cannot rid myself of the thought that I have made her love me; and now I am behaving like a damned scoundrel."

He spoke in a tone of such deep and sorrowful self-reproach that Pollyooly could not keep silence:

"Oh no, sir," she said quickly. "She doesn't love you; she loves Alf."

"Alf? Who is Alf?" cried Hilary Vance, with a sudden fierceness.

"His other name's 'Brown.' He's her young man," said Pollyooly.

"Her young man? What does this mean? Has she been playing me false?" cried Hilary Vance, in a rising tone of terrible wrath.

"This is news. Tell us all about it, Pollyooly," said Mr James, quietly.

"I can't. I mustn't tell tales," said Pollyooly, in some distress.

"You may really tell us. It isn't really telling tales. It's—it's exposing a fraud—a very different matter," said Mr James, earnestly. "Tell

us about Ermyntrude's young man—he really is her young man ? ”

“ Oh, yes ; he's going to marry her on Wednesday fortnight,” said Pollyooly, firmly.

“ This is truly interesting,” said Mr James, with a joyful smile.

“ What ? Have I been distressing myself with the most honourable scruples for nothing at all ? Has this creature been playing me false ? ” bellowed Hilary Vance, in his most terrible voice.

“ It does look as if there had been a misapprehension somewhere,” said Mr James, with a touch of mockery in his tone. “ Of course it cannot possibly be that your impassioned wooing failed to stir the depths of Ermyntrude's being.”

“ It—is—the—natural — perfidy — of — women — perfidy — for — perfidy's — sake ! ” bellowed Hilary Vance, emphasising each word by slapping his right hand down on his left.

“ I see. Ermyntrude has flown in the face of her adoration ? ” said Mr James, in dispassionate inquiry.

“ Perfidy — for — perfidy's — sake ! ” repeated Hilary Vance, with the same convincing smacks and in the same convincing bellow.

“ Well, well, you ought to know,” said Mr James, placably dismissing the psychological issue. “ But let us delve more deeply into this mine of information we have discovered just in the nick of time.

THE SQUARING OF ERMYNTRUDE 129

Tell us all you know about the fair Ermyntrude and her Alf, Pollyooly."

Pollyooly told them at length of the interview between the lovers.

Hilary Vance, his eyes raging, bellowed, "Monstrous treachery! Monstrous!"

Mr James said, "Now, I'm in charge of this affair; and I'm going to run it in my own way. If you interfere by as much as a word, Hilary, I clear straight out of this studio. If I do, Alf, or no Alf, you'll be married to Ermyntrude on Wednesday fortnight."

He spoke in a tone of dreadful, impressive certainty.

Hilary Vance shivered and said in a milder voice, "All right, James, all right. You do just as you like; you're the diplomatist."

Mr James asked Pollyooly several questions about the conversation between the lovers. Then there came a knocking at the front door, and he sent her to admit Ermyntrude.

The deceitful fair one entered with her best forlorn air, her handkerchief in her hand, ready for instant use.

"Well, Ermyntrude?" said Mr James, in a tone of polite inquiry.

"I've come for 'is answer—'is definite answer," said Ermyntrude, in a very sombre tone, nodding towards Hilary Vance.

"Oh, we thought you might have made other arrangements," said Mr James.

"Wot other arryngements? I ain't made no other arryngements," said Ermyntrode, sharply. "Is 'e goin' ter marry me, or isn't he? That's wot I've come to 'ear."

Hilary Vance gasped enormously and began "I wouldn't——"

"You shut up!" snapped Mr James, cutting him short; and he turned to Ermyntrode and added suavely, "Mr Vance is not going to marry you."

"Wot about my 'eart?" said Ermyntrode, in a moaning voice; and she pressed her handkerchief to her quite dry eyes.

"It's his art that has to be considered," said Mr James. "He has decided that marriage would not foster it. It is a celibate art. Therefore he cannot marry you."

"But 'e's got to marry me! 'e promised to; an' 'e shall! 'e's not goin' to plye fast an' loose wiv me! The Lor is the Lor!" cried Ermyntrode, fiercely, abandoning utterly the suppliant pose.

"That's where you're wrong, I fear. The Law is whatever we choose to pay for it. But anyhow the Law doesn't allow you to commit bigamy," said Mr James.

"Bigamy! 'oo are you gittin' at?" cried

Ermyntrude with a sudden note of panic in her voice.

"You have arranged to marry Alfred Brown on Wednesday fortnight; and now you come asking Mr Vance to marry you. It can't be done," said Mr James.

With paling face, Ermyntrude burst into a storm of violent but untruthful denial.

Mr James let it pass; then he said, "The game's up, Ermyntrude. The Law doesn't allow you to kiss one gentleman in Battersea Park and pester another to marry you."

Ermyntrude protested with even greater violence that she had never considered Hilary Vance a gentleman.

"That is purely a matter of opinion," said Mr James, in a dispassionate tone.

Ermyntrude denied this; then she suddenly assumed an air of steely dignity and said, "Give me my compensation. Give me that fifty pounds you hofferred."

"No, Ermyntrude. You have lost all claim upon Mr Vance by your attempt to commit bigamy. Your lawyer will tell you so," said Mr James.

Ermyntrude burst into a storm of threats; but they rang but half-hearted. The note of panic in her tone was deeper. She declared again and again that she would have the "Lor" of Hilary

Vance; then she burst into tears, genuine tears, at the vanishing of her glorious dream.

"I oughter 'ave compensytion, I ought. Look 'ow I've bin treated—made a fool of—by the likes of 'em," she wailed.

"That's another matter," said Mr James, in a judicial tone. "You have forfeited any right to any compensation at all by the double-faced game you've been playing. But Mr Vance did play the fool. Therefore he ought to pay for it. He will give you ten pounds towards your establishment in the married state—towards your furniture."

The words seemed words of solace, for the violence of Ermytrude's grief began to abate; the colour began to flow back into her cheeks.

"It's not what I oughter have, but it's better than nothink," she said, in a much less mournful voice.

Mr James handed her two five pound notes.

Ermytrude took them with a haste that was very near a snatch, and moved with some speed towards the door. She turned the handle quickly, sniffed, said "Thanks" in a somewhat humble tone, and vanished.

Hilary Vance raised his large right hand towards the ceiling, and began in a solemn tone, "To think that such a creature—so unscrupulous—so lost to all sense——"

"So unappreciative of your manly charm,"

interrupted Mr James. "Don't talk rot, Hilary. If you'd seen as little money in your life as Ermyntrude has in hers, you wouldn't stick at a little game like that to make fifty pounds."

Hilary Vance lowered his hand: "Perhaps you're right, James," he said.

"Of course I'm right," said Mr James. "But there's one good thing, and that is that Ermyntrude and her Alf are beginning their married life on ten pounds and not fifty—fifty would have been ruination."

A sudden air of ample beatitude spread over Hilary Vance's large face, and he bellowed "The cloud is lifted! I'm free! I'm free!"

Then with a terrific whoop he sprang into the air. Then he danced. It was not light; it was not graceful; it was not elegant. It was elephantine and tremendous; and he accompanied it with a succession of ear-splitting yells which would have done credit to a locomotive.

When at last exhaustion suddenly fell on him, he stopped, and said in a breathless voice, "I must give Pollyooly ten pounds too."

"Certainly not," said Mr James. "The possession of so much red gold would inevitably drive a child of her tender years to a course of luxurious chocolate dissipation, and for ever destroy her digestion."

"But she has saved me," cried Mr Hilary Vance.

“ We'll buy her ten pounds worth of clothes—her and that extraordinarily clean little brother of her's. How would you like that, Pollyooly ? ” said Mr James.

“ Oh, sir, it would be splendid ! ” said Pollyooly ; and her eyes shone like stars in the tropics.

“ Right ! I will choose them for her myself ! She shall be dressed like a dream ! ” cried Mr Hilary Vance.

“ A ten-pound dream,” said Mr James. “ Let's have tea.”

CHAPTER V

LOVE'S MESSENGER

BOTH Hilary Vance and Mr James were quite alive to the difficulty of the task of adorning angel children with fitting raiment. For four days Mr James came every afternoon to tea ; and they discussed gravely the forms, colours, and shades of colour of the frocks and tunics which should most nobly set out the beauty of Pollyooly and the Lump.

For ever the keener taste of Mr James curbed Hilary Vance's tendency to the flamboyant : it was his strong desire to robe Pollyooly in stiff cloth of gold. But Mr James urged firmly that Pollyooly was a human being and not a figure in a piece of tapestry, that no human being who was not an utter fool would dream of robing himself, or herself, in cloth of go'd, save, of course, for the purpose of impressing utter fools.

But little by little their discussions clarified their ideas on the matter ; and they came to Liberty's on the appointed afternoon with their minds clear about the colours and the tints which would give full value to Pollyooly's frail and delicate beauty.

Thus it came about that once in the shop they were quick finding what they wanted. Pollyooly became the possessor of a frock of a golden silk, a frock of a greenish-blue silk, with silk stockings to match them, two print frocks of greyish blue, and a hat which she could fittingly wear with either of the silk frocks. The Lump had a tunic of golden silk, and one of blue silk, to match the frocks of Pollyooly, two tunics of linen, and a golden cap.

The Honourable John Ruffin was informed by the joyous Pollyooly of the great equipment, and professed himself eager indeed to see her in her finery.

He said sententiously, by way of an afterthought, "Woman survives by her vanity. It is good that yours should not be allowed to become atrophied by lack of its proper sustenance."

"Yes, sir," said Pollyooly, in polite assent.

While the frocks were being made, on the very day before they were to be finished and sent to her, fell the Lump's third birthday. To Pollyooly it was the most important day in their year, far more important than her own birthday. She felt that the anniversary must be duly celebrated, and that the fact that she was not herself spending money on her clothes put the due celebration of it within her power and means. She braced herself to the

heroic height of resolving to spend half-a-crown on it, if need were.

The Lump therefore was rejoiced to find awaiting him on the breakfast table a woolly lamb, purchased at Gamage's for tenpence halfpenny. After breakfast Pollyooly made haste with her work; and it was finished by dinner-time. After dinner, she led and carried him up Chancery Lane; and, from the top of it, they took a bus to the Marble Arch. To her country mind trees and green turf were necessary to festivals.

At the Marble Arch they disembarked, gained the Park, and walked decorously down Rotten Row; and it would be hard to say whether their faces or their attire were the more out of place in that haunt of fashion. An angel child, in an oft-washed blue print frock, accompanied by an authentic, but red-headed, cherub seemed indeed ill-placed in it; and though persons of breeding smiled with pleasure when their eyes rested on the two charming faces, the snobs elevated their frequently-pencilled eyebrows at their shabby dress, and some of them inquired of their friends what the police were thinking of. Probably, if the painful truth were known, they were thinking with longing of the cooks in the rich kitchens of Park Lane.

Certainly, no sense of the unfitness of her frock marred Pollyooly's pleasure; and she watched the

sparkling scene with the dazzled eyes of a country child. The Lump appeared less dazzled than she by the splendour through which he moved, but, quite content.

She strolled, and he toddled half-way to Hyde Park Corner; then, thinking that he had walked far enough, she led him to a tree close to the path; and they sat down, inexpensively, on the grass at its foot.

The Lump abandoned himself to the full enjoyment of his new and woolly treasure; Pollyooly abandoned herself to the full enjoyment of the sparkling scene. Presently her eyes fell on a pretty girl, with eyes of nearly as deep a blue as her own, who was sitting a few yards away. She was charmingly dressed in a confection of light blue, and beside her sat her sour-faced mother, dressed in a much more elaborate confection of the same tint.

Pollyooly gazed at the pretty girl with some pleasure and more envy for a minute or two, thinking that it must be glorious, indeed, to have nothing to do all day but wear such beautiful clothes. Idleness appealed to her very strongly, though no one could have suggested that she did not do the work of the two sets of chambers in the King's Bench Walk in a thoroughly creditable fashion. But she often felt, as children will, that a whole day's holiday would be very pleasant

indeed. It also seemed, for her for ever impossible.

Then the pretty girl's eyes, drawn by the attraction of Pollyooly's intent gaze, fell on her; and she smiled.

Pollyooly flushed a little; she feared that she had been caught in the act of staring, and, like the well-mannered child she was, it made her uncomfortable. The pretty girl's eyes wandered from Pollyooly to the Lump, and she smiled again. Pollyooly flushed again; this time with pride. The pretty girl's eyes wandered to a point above Pollyooly's head; she looked, startled, glanced at her sour-faced mother, looked back, and again smiled.

Then a voice above Pollyooly's head said quietly, "Little girl, do you think you could do something for me?"

Pollyooly, startled in her turn, looked up to find a very fine-looking gentleman, as finely dressed as the Honourable John Ruffin himself, looking down at her, and hidden by the trunk of the tree from the sour-faced dowager.

Pollyooly liked his face. It was an honest face, good-natured, and very like that of the Apollo Belvedere. She did not think, indeed, that it could compare with the face of the Honourable John Ruffin, who, to her eyes, was the very type of manly beauty; and since her ideal was the clean-shaven, she did not approve of the close-

cropped moustache. 'But she found it a nice face, the face of one to be trusted.

"If I can, sir," she said amiably.

"Well, do you think that you could give that young lady in blue, 'sitting just over there, a note without anyone seeing you?" said the gentleman.

"I'll try, -sir," said Pollyooly, briskly, her face lighting up at the prospect of action.

"I'll give you half-a-crown if you can work it," said the gentleman; and Pollyooly's face grew still brighter at the prospect of this munificent reward.

The gentleman took a slim betting-book from his pocket, wrote in it, apparently with some labour, and tore the leaf out of it.

Then he said, "Here it is. How are you going to work it?"

Pollyooly gazed at him with puckered brow. The life of Alsatia and the struggle to preserve the Lump from the Workhouse had indeed sharpened her wits; but no risks must be taken in the matter of earning half-a-crown.

Then her face brightened again, and she said, "Do you want those violets very much, sir? If you don't, I could stick the note in the middle of them, and nobody could see it."

"Rippin' idea! That's just where I wanted the violets to go when I bought them on the chance.

She likes violets better than any flowers," said the gentleman, in a tone of warm enthusiasm.

With that he took them out of his button-hole and gave them to her. Then he looked cautiously round the tree-trunk. The pretty girl was watching them covertly. He held out the note for her to see, and pointed to Pollyooly. Pollyooly untied the violets with deft fingers, set the note in the middle of them, and tied them up again. The pretty girl watched her with sparkling eyes.

Then Pollyooly looked at the pretty girl thoughtfully, and said, "I may as well do it now, sir."

"Right you are. She's tumbled to what you're up to all right," said the gentleman, eagerly. "When you've given them to her walk straight on; and I'll catch you up."

Pollyooly rose, took the Lump by the hand, and sauntered towards the pretty girl. Two yards from her, she said to the Lump, "Give these flowers to the pretty lady, Lump, dear.". And she gave him the violets.

The Lump toddled up to the chairs with a very grave and earnest face, and offered the violets to the sour-faced dowager. It was not only that he was of too tender years to be a trustworthy judge of female beauty, but the dowager was by far the more resplendent creature of the two. Even her cheeks flamed with more brilliant,

though less natural, roses than did the cheeks of her daughter ; and, on a fine day, her hat would have caught the eye nearly a thousand yards away.

The sour-faced dowager sniffed in a manner we are little used to associate with our aristocracy, and eyed the gift with cold scorn. The pretty girl bent hastily forward and took the violets.

"Thank you, you dear little boy," she said.

"Grizel ! What a thing to do !" cried her mother. "Taking flowers from a red-headed little beggar ! They're infectious ! I'm sure of it ! Throw them away at once !"

"He's quite a clean little boy, and the violets are quite fresh," said the pretty girl, very firmly ; and she put the shilling she had ready into the Lump's fat little hand.

"A shilling !" cried her mother. "A shilling for a twopenny bunch of violets ! If that's the way you waste your allowance, no wonder you're always hard up at the end of the month ! Besides, it's encouraging begging—barefaced begging !"

"Oh, I'm sure they aren't beggars ! Look how clean they are," said the pretty girl.

"Say 'Thank you,' Lump, dear," said Pollyooly, quickly.

The Lump said "Tank 'oo," and she drew him hastily away. She was afraid lest the sour-faced lady should violently recover the shilling.

She walked quickly, and a hundred yards

farther on (well out of sight of the sour-faced one) the gentleman caught them up.

“By Jove, the way you worked it was a marvel!” he cried in tones of high delight. “I tell you what: where do you live? You might do another job or two like this for me. I want them doing badly.”

“I’m Mr Ruffin’s housekeeper; and I live with him at 75 The King’s Bench Walk in the Temple,” said Pollyooly, with the proper pride in her good address.

He pulled out his betting-book and wrote down the address.

“I wonder if your Mr Ruffin is the Honourable John?” he said thoughtfully. “He does live in the Temple.”

“All his tradesmen call him the Honourable John Buffin till they lose their tempers; and there’s only a cat between him and a peerage—he says there is,” said Pollyooly.

“A cat? A cat between him and a peerage?” said the gentleman mystified.

“Because a cat has nine lives—he says it has,” said Pollyooly.

“That’s the Honourable John all right,” said the gentleman, in a tone of certainty. “By Jove! It’s rippin’ your being his housekeeper. I shall be able to get you whenever I want you. Tell him I’m going to borrow you—often.”

"Yes, sir," said Pollyooly. "Who shall I tell him?"

"I'm Basil Croome—Captain Croome, and my present address is Knightsbridge Barracks. That's where I shall want you to come when I've got a job for you. Do you think you'll be able to find it?"

"Oh, yes; I can always find my way anywhere—policemen tell me," said Pollyooly.

"No: I'll come and fetch you, if I can get away. No good taking chances," said Captain Croome.

He pulled a handful of money out of his pocket, took half-a-crown from it, and gave it to her. He thanked her warmly for delivering the note, shook hands with her, turned on his heel, and walked quickly up the Row, doubtless to feast once more his eyes on his lady-love.

Pollyooly continued her course down the Row in a very contented frame of mind: to go out braced to the extravagance of spending, if need were, half-a-crown, and to earn three-and-sixpence was indeed splendid. They wandered for an hour along the banks of the Serpentine; they sat on its bank for another hour. Then the Lump said firmly that he was hungry.

She carried him out of the Park; and they went by bus to Piccadilly. Then came the action of the day that needed true courage. She was resolved

that the Lump should have a splendid birthday tea ; and she was doubtful of the reception their clothes would procure them in a tea-shop. None the less she entered. " The Retreat " with a very firm air.

The waitresses looked somewhat askance at her, but doubtless that firm air cowed them. On the other hand, it may have been that the waitresses had not the heart to refuse sustenance to angel children. At any rate they sat down at a table in a corner and made the tea of a dream off chocolate éclairs and cocoa. After it, in a great peace, they took their way slowly to Trafalgar Square to see the fountains playing. There they stayed till the Lump grew sleepy, then took a bus to the Temple and bed.

The next morning, after bringing in the Honourable John Ruffin's bacon, Pollyooly did not at once proceed to the gathering up of his strewn garments. She looked at him with eager eyes, and said :

" Please, sir, I met a gentleman, who knows you, in the Park yesterday, and he told me to tell you he was going to borrow me. He gave me a whole half-crown for giving a lady a letter in a bunch of violets—at least, the Lump did. And she gave him a shilling. His name is Captain Croome, and he lives in Knightsbridge Barracks. He wants me to do it again." .

With a faint gasp the Honourable John Ruffin

set down his knife and fork, and gazed at her with bewildered eyes.

"My dear Mrs. Bride," he said faintly, "I am aware that the art of boiling down romances for popular consumption is highly esteemed and lucrative. But I'm not popular; and I do not suffer from consumption. Do you think you could narrate this romance in its unabridged form? Could you tell me all about it?"

Pollyooly assumed the grave air of the narrator, and told him of the Lump's birthday treat, of the request of the strange gentleman, and of the Lump's delivery of the note in the bunch of violets. She dwelt at length on the pretty way in which the Lump had handed the violets to the wrong lady. Then she explained that Captain Croome wished to borrow her to perform other jobs for him of a like nature, and probably paid for, with a like munificence.

The Honourable John Ruffin listened to her with smiling attention and at the end he said :

"Yet another unsuspected talent. You are full of surprises, Mrs. Bride; full of them. But, after all, it is only natural that a person of your genius for grilling bacon should have all the accomplishments. You are versatile, indeed."

"Yes, sir," said Pollyooly, politely, but with a very dim understanding of his meaning, though she gathered that he was complimenting her.

"But if the lady's mother addressed her as 'Grizel,' she must be Lady Grizel Harland; and Croome will borrow you in vain," he went on thoughtfully. "The Tullislaiths have more ambitious views for their daughter, and Croome's beggarly five thousand a year will not soften their hearts."

"Yes, sir," said the uncomprehending Pollyooly, politely.

"But if you like to try to smooth the path of a hopeless true love, there is nothing against it. So if Captain Croome calls on you to help him, you can do it with a clear conscience, since his lady-love's mamma will see to it that nothing whatever comes of it; and your conscience will never be able to reproach you for having aided two fellow-creatures to marry in haste and repent at leisure."

"No, sir. Thank you, sir," said Pollyooly, with a beaming smile, for she gathered that she had his leave to earn more half-crowns as the Messenger of Love.

. That afternoon the frocks and tunics came from Liberty's; and Pollyooly spent an hour of rapture putting them on, and enjoying the fine appearance she and the Lump presented. The next morning she put on the golden frock for the Honourable John Ruffin to admire; and he protested that she surpassed all his dreams of the angels.

All that day and the next, she looked with eager impatience for Captain Croome to come to borrow her. She took the Lump for his airings only in the King's Bench Walk lest he should come and find her out. But it was not till ten o'clock on the third day that he appeared.

Pollyooly, her hope of half-crowns burning brightly, ushered him into the sitting-room, where he found the Honourable John Ruffin in his wig and gown, on the point of starting for the Law Courts; and the sight of that comforting attire assured him that he had come to the very man to advise him.

"How are you, Ruffin?" he said warmly. "Seein' that little housekeeper of yours the other day in the Park, put it into my head that you might be able to give me a tip about a difficult job I'm tryin' to pull off."

"Advice is the one thing I have in unlimited quantities, so I never stint my friends of it," said the Honourable John Ruffin, amiably.

"Right," said Captain Croome, hopefully. "It's about a lady."

"Stop!" said the Honourable John Ruffin, sharply. "In that case the proper course would be to consult me through a solicitor. But I'd rather you didn't. As much as I can, I avoid Divorce Court practice; the Divorce Court is always so full of our friends. But I will just say

one thing: don't let the affair come into Court at all, not on any account."

"No, no! You've got it wrong—quite wrong," protested Captain Croome, hastily. "It isn't a Divorce Court business at all. In fact, it's just the other way about. I want to get married. I want to marry Lady Grizel Harland, and the Tullislaiths won't hear of it."

"Yes; I gathered from Mrs Bride's lucid account of her adventure that it was Lady Grizel Harland," said the Honourable John Ruffin.

"Who's Mrs Bride?" said Captain Croome, quickly.

"She's my housekeeper—the little girl who devised the violet process. She is called *Mrs* Bride because she is my housekeeper. Housekeepers are always 'Mrs.' But what you've got to do is to wear the Tullislaiths down," said the Honourable John Ruffin, with decision.

"I've been wearing them down for months don't you know; but it doesn't seem to come off," said Captain Croome, ruefully. "And if it doesn't come off soon, it won't come off at all. The old cat has caught the Otter for Grizel, and the marriage is nearly fixed up."

Sir Otto Leiter, an English baronet (by right of purchase) of the old Hamburg strain was known to his acquaintances as the Otter of account on his remarkable sleekness.

"Yes; I was told that it was arranged," said the Honourable John Ruffin.

"Well, I'm going to stop it!" cried Captain Croome, with some heat.

"I don't think you will. Lady Tullislaith is a tough old cat—you don't mind my calling the mother-in-law of your dreams a tough old cat?" said the Honourable John Ruffin.

"Not I—she always calls you the most dangerous detrimental in London," said Captain Croome.

"I *have* pointed out to several poor young things the horrors of a loveless marriage," said the Honourable John Ruffin, in a tone of satisfaction. "Well, Lady Tullislaith is a tough old cat and the Marquess is a hopeless stick. Your only chance is to persuade Lady Grizel to chuck the Otter and make a bolt of it."

"But that's just it. I can't get a chance of persuading her to do anything, because I can't get near her," said Captain Croome, dolefully.

"As soon as the Otter appeared on the scene Lady Tullislaith told me she didn't want me at her house. And now that she's nailed him, she doesn't let Grizel out of her sight. She never lets her go to a dance where we could talk—only to dinners, where she won't meet me, and to theatres with the Otter. Grizel never stirs out of the house without her mother or a perfect beast of a maid to keep me

off. How can I persuade her?" said Captain Croome, yet more dolefully.

"There is the penny post, which was invented by Sir Rowland Hill to meet emergencies of this very kind. Wherever were you at school not to learn that? Use it, man—use it," said the Honourable John Ruffin in spirited tones.

"But I can't use it!" cried Captain Croome, in a tone of bitter exasperation. "The old cat opens all Grizel's letters, and sends mine back to me with nasty remarks about my persecuting a young girl with unwelcome attentions. And they aren't unwelcome—I know they aren't."

"Well, if you're sure of that, you've only got to be patient. Lady Grizel has much too much character to marry the Otter, if she really cares for you."

"Oh, come, Ruffin, you know that it isn't safe. You know that girls are always being worried and badgered and bullied into marrying these rich bounders they hate. That's one of the things that keeps the Divorce Court so full," said Captain Croome, unhappily.

"Yes; there is that danger," said the Honourable John Ruffin, thoughtfully. "And, after all, things do look bad; they're not quite twentieth century; there's a mediæval breadth about Lady Tullislaith's methods; and I don't think there's much she'd stick at. I do loathe the old cat."

"So do I," said Captain Croome, heartily. "What am I to do?"

"Well, when you meet the Middle Ages the one thing to do is to be mediæval. But you can't carry off a girl by force nowadays—at least it's difficult, if she's been well brought up and active with golf and tennis. She can appeal to the police too. There were no police, to speak of, to appeal to in the day of romance," said the Honourable John Ruffin in a tone of regret.

"I wish I could carry her off," said Captain Croome.

"Still, you might surreptitiously persuade her to run away with you. Get a special licence, and any parson can marry you anywhere. There's a very good church over the way. Why not use it? No one would look for you there—if the Tullis-laitks pursue. The thing is to persuade and be ready," said the Honourable John Ruffin.

"Good man! I'll do it," cried Captain Croome. Then his face fell; and he added: "But I say, isn't there something about being of age when you get married? Grizel is only nineteen-and-a-half."

"Then on the old Jesuit principle that the end justified the means, you will have to raise her age in getting that licence to twenty-one-and-a-half. Of course, this renders you liable to prosecution for false entry. But no true lover would let prison

stand between him and wedlock," said the Honourable John Ruffin, enthusiastically.

"If it was for Grizel, I'd stick it out," said Captain Croome, simply. "But all the same, I shan't persuade her to bolt with me in one letter or in two. She's been so strictly brought up. It'll need a lot of writing to do it; and writing ain't my strong point. But it's got to be done. Will you lend me your little housekeeper to work the letter racket?"

"Only after bacon hours," said the Honourable John Ruffin, firmly.

"Bacon hours?" said Captain Croome, with a puzzled air.

"In spite of her red hair, or, perhaps, because of it, Mrs Bride is the one person in London who can grill bacon as bacon should be grilled. She must not leave here till after breakfast," said the Honourable John Ruffin, with unabated firmness.

"That's all right," said Captain Croome, with some relief. "There's nothing doing before breakfast. Grizel walks in Kensington Gardens from eleven to twelve every morning. That's the time to work it."

"But how is Mrs. Bride going to deliver your letters?"

"It isn't going to be an easy job," said Captain Croome. "I was thinking that she might hit on a way. She hit on those violets."

"You stick to violets," said the Honourable John Ruffin, with quick decision. "Lady Grizel knows that Pollyooly, violets, and notes go together. When she sees Pollyooly and violets, she'll know that a note is there."

"By jove! That's the tip!" cried Captain Croome.

"You can begin by fitting Pollyooly out as a flower-girl, and letting her meet Lady Grizel on her way to Kensington Gardens," said the Honourable John Ruffin, slowly. "That ought to get three letters through—at least. When it is found out, we'll try something else."

"Right! By Jove, I do wish I'd come to you earlier! You do have rippin' ideas!" said Captain Croome, with a grateful appreciation of the Honourable John Ruffin's strategic ability.

The Honourable John Ruffin summoned Pollyooly, and unfolded this plan. She listened to it carefully, and slowly a radiant smile illumined her angel face; his words opened a vista of half-crowns.

At the end of it she said, "I shall have to take the Lump, sir."

"By all means," said the Honourable John Ruffin. "He will lend a further air of verisimilitude to an absolutely authentic flower-seller. And both of you had better go just as you are—in your

old clothes and without hats. You won't catch cold on a sunny morning like this."

Pollyooly looked just a trifle distressed.

"Yes, yes! I know that you feel it beneath your dignity as my housekeeper to go about hatless. But it is beneath your dignity as my housekeeper to sell flowers in the street at all. Let us go the whole hog even though we cannot turn him into bacon," said the Honourable John Ruffin, quickly.

"Yes, sir," said Pollyooly, with an air of resignation.

Captain Croome sat down at the writing-table, and wrote his note to Grizel—laboriously. At intervals his groans of parturition were uncommonly like grunts. Then Pollyooly fetched the Lump, and they went downstairs in a body. They got into Captain Croome's motor car, and the Honourable John Ruffin wished them good-bye and good luck. Captain Croome drove to Covent Garden, and there he bought violets in the bunch, and in a neighbouring street a flower-seller's basket. Then he drove to Prince's Gate, wherein stood the Tullislaiths' town house. On the way Pollyooly hid the note in a bunch of violets; and as he passed them he pointed out Knightsbridge Barracks to her. They were less than ten minutes walk from the scene of operations.

Captain Croome drove fifty yards beyond Prince's

Gate, stopped the car, and bade Pollyooly come to the Barracks with the tidings of her success or failure. Then he drove off, leaving her adjusting the strap of the basket round her neck.

Pollyooly presented the very picture of the ideal flower-seller. A Royal Academician, not observing that she was far too clean for the real, would have burned to paint her on the spot; her angel face and limpid blue eyes were in such admirable accord with the innocent violets she bore.

That sedate, but red-headed, cherub, the Lump, added just the pretty final touch that completed the picture of the ideal.

Pollyooly's heart beat high, and by no means only with the mercenary anticipation of half-a-crown. She was full of the joyful sense of adventure; and angel smile after angel smile wreathed her beautiful lips. Now and again, however a faint frown knitted her brow as she considered the importance of her mission and the grave responsibility which rested on her.

The Lump was no less content. With the air of an immature shepherd he drew his woolly lamb by a string along the smooth pavement.

They walked slowly down to the entrance of the Park, and, just as they came to it, a kind, but sallow, lady, of some fifty-five winters stopped them and bought a bunch of violets. Then she began to make inquiries about their home and parents.

Pollyooly was taken aback. It was an event for which she had not bargained. She answered the questions about her parents easily enough, for they had been dead several years. But over the question of domicile she hesitated. The Honourable John Ruffin's statement that it was beneath the dignity of his housekeeper to sell flowers in the street had stuck in her mind; and of that position she was growing prouder and prouder the longer she held it.

For a full minute she was at a loss for words, then she stammered: "Please, we live with Mr Ruffin, and he wouldn't like us to say where."

"I expect not," said the kind lady, shaking her head with a dark look. "And Ruffin is a very appropriate name for him, living on the begging of young children."

Pollyooly could not believe her ears. When she did, the red hair came out. With a scarlet face and blazing eyes, she cried furiously, "It isn't true! He doesn't do any such thing! He wouldn't! He's just the kindest gentleman that ever was! Give me back those violets!"

"The kind, but sallow lady turned yellower, and shrank back.

Pollyooly sprang upon her, tore the violets from her nerveless fingers, thrust the penny into them, and said, "There you are! Take it! And just

don't you interfere with me again! You mind your own business!"

The kind, but fallow, lady turned, and frankly scuttled off. She was so greatly upset by the fury of Pollyooly's onslaught that she scuttled fully a hundred yards before she remembered that she had a weak heart. Then she took a cab, and went home to have some fits of palpitation, and resolve never again to seek the good of ideal flower-sellers.

Pollyooly looked after her scuttling form with a dark and lowering frown; then her face began to clear, for her anger was used to go as quickly as it came. But before it was quite clear, two young men and two maidens descended on her and began to buy her violets. They were some time about it, for they had to laugh and joke a great deal. The young men gave her two shillings, and passed on.

Pollyooly looked at the two shillings, and then, bidding the Lump stand quite still, ran after them.

"Please, sir, you've given me two shillings; and it's only one!" she cried, holding out one of the shillings.

"Oh, that's all right," said one of the young men, smiling back at her.

Pollyooly returned to the Lump, wondering at the extravagance of the leisured classes.

Then she saw Lady Grizel Harland crossing the road, accompanied by a gaunt maid of dragon-like aspect. Grizel walked with a very listless step, wearing a sombre air; she looked to be plunged in gloomy reflection. At first her eyes rested on Pollyooly and the Lump with no light of recognition in them. Then they brightened; then they saw the violets, and brightened yet more; and then that angel child, Pollyooly—I blush to tell it—closed her left eye in a deliberate and premeditated wink. As she winked she held out a bunch of violets.

Grizel flushed, and her eyes sparkled like stars.

“Oh, what pretty children!” she cried in the most ingenuous tone, conveying to her watchful dragon the strong impression that she had never set her beautiful eyes on them before—so true is it that even in the most innocent woman there is a vast store of protective deceit, only waiting for the pressure of necessity to be drawn upon for her advantage.

Even as she spoke, her fingers closed on the bunch of violets in Pollyooly’s outstretched hand.

She fastened them firmly in her waistband. Then she took a shilling from her purse and gave it to Pollyooly, while her maid snorted in the genuine dragon fashion; and, if flame did not burst from her nostrils, it was not for want of will.

"What's your name, little girl?" said Grizel.

"My name's Mary Bride, but everybody calls me, Pollyooly," said that angel child.

"Then you have two pretty names," said Grizel. "And I suppose this dear little boy is your brother?"

"Yes, ma'am," said Pollyooly.

Grizel picked him up and kissed him. She had to kiss someone, with those violets in her belt.

"I do wonder at you, Lady Grizel!" cried her scandalised maid, in a tone of utter disgust. "Picking up a beggar's brat in the streets and kissing him!"

"He won't bite, Symons," said Grizel, coldly. "And he's as clean as a new pin."

She set down the Lump, kissed Pollyooly, glancing defiantly at her maid as she did it, bade them good-bye, and walked on. Her hand kept straying to the violets in her belt to assure her that they were still there. As she went into the Park she turned and blew a kiss of gratitude to Pollyooly.

Pollyooly walked quickly on towards the barracks, so full of pleasure at the successful accomplishment of her task that she had quite forgotten the kind, but sallow, lady. Half-way to the barracks a very savage-looking old gentleman stopped short in front of them, bringing them

up dead, and, scowling fiercely at Pollyooly, dragged a handful of money from his pocket, and gave her sixpence.

Timidly and hastily Pollyooly took three bunches of violets from her basket and held them out to him.

He gazed at them as if he could have torn them to pieces with his teeth. "Violets!" he cried, with ill-contained ferocity. "I don't want any violets! Keep them! Beastly things!" And he went furiously on.

"T-t-thank you, sir," said Pollyooly, faintly after him; and she dropped a curtesy to the empty air.

The old gentleman went on with unabated savagery. He was plainly one of those to whom vegetable beauty does not appeal.

Before she reached the barracks, Pollyooly sold four more bunches of violets. As she went up the steps of that palatial structure, she was puzzling over the difficult question of how much of the four-and-twopence she had earned belonged rightfully to Captain Croome. She could not but regard the savage old gentleman's sixpence as her own, but she was very doubtful about Grizel's shilling.

The sentry at the top of the steps was for stopping her, but another soldier, Captain Croome's servant, was awaiting her coming, told him that

she was to be admitted, and conducted her and the Lump to Captain Croome's quarters.

He was awaiting her impatiently, and, when he learned that she had been successful in her mission, he overwhelmed her with thanks and praise. Then he told her that he would probably want her again on the morrow, and gave her five shillings.

Pollyooly took them with shining eyes; she had only expected half-a-crown. Then she laid down three-and-eightpence on the table.

"What's this?" said Captain Croome, somewhat startled.

"That's what I sold some of the violets for," said Pollyooly.

"Keep it, keep it," said Captain Croome, laughing. "You've earned it fifty times over. And take the basket along with you, ready for to-morrow."

Pollyooly stammered out her thanks and came out of the Barracks somewhat stunned. She had made nine shillings and twopence by less than half-an-hour's easy work. Such an exploit ran counter to all experience; she was too young to grasp the fact that there were two quite distinct worlds, and that a fortunate accident had thrown her into the world in which money was.

When she came out of the Barracks, she was tempted to walk down to Piccadilly and sell more violets as she went, but it did not seem to her

right. She felt that it was one thing for the Housekeeper of the Honourable John Ruffin to sell flowers in the street as a cloak to her real work as Love's Messenger, but another thing for her to sell violets for the mere sake of money.

But as she rode home on the motor-bus, she consoled herself by the thought that she had discovered a lucrative profession to which she could profitably devote herself, when the evil day came, against the coming of which the Honourable John Ruffin often warned her, and his creditors, at last victorious, hailed him to the dungeons of Holloway.

As they passed the Park, she looked into it longingly, she would have liked to take the Lump to the banks of the Serpentine for an hour. But she had come away from the Temple before her work was done; and there were beds to make, and bedrooms to dust. She set about them as soon as she reached the Temple; and when they were done, she put the violets in water and disposed them about the two sitting-rooms. Then she gave the Lump his dinner, and after it she went forth to the Post Office with her Savings Bank book and paid nine shillings into her account.

As she went out of the Post Office, the girl who had entered the deposit in her book, said to the older girl beside her, "Where that child gets the

money she does beats me. She's paid in more than twenty-five pounds in two months."

"I expect her face has a lot to do with it," said the older girl, with an air of wide experience. "You know what men are. It's all the face with them."

"They are silly," said the younger girl contemptuously.

"Yes. But I wish I'd got that brat's face," said the older girl slowly.

The next morning the Honourable John Ruffin found his room scented and adorned with violets; and when Pollyooly brought in his bacon, he thanked her for them and asked how she had fared in her mission. She told him how easily she had delivered the note to Grizel.

"So far so good; but—I should like to have written that note myself," said the Honourable John Ruffin, thoughtfully, with the air of one who had a deep-rooted distrust of the epistolary powers of the Household Brigade.

It proved well-founded, for he had finished his breakfast but a few minutes when Captain Croome came in, in a very sombre mood.

He sank heavily into an easy-chair, and said gloomily, "It's no go; she won't hear of it."

"Isn't it rather early to be depressed?" said the Honourable John Ruffin, calmly. "What,

after all, is a woman's 'No'? Is it not a polite form of 'Yes'?"

"That sounds as if you'd begun to rot; and if you have, there's no doing anything," said Captain Croome, sadly.

"Well, you didn't expect her to see it the first time, did you?" said his adviser coldly. "And, what's more, you wouldn't have liked it if she had. What you've got to do is to peg away."

"She seems awfully determined about it. Her letter's very firm," said Captain Croome; but his face brightened a little.

"Of course it is. The idea startled her at first. It would startle any nice girl. But probably by now she's beginning to think how nice it would be if she could. If you write the right kind of letters, you'll make it seem nicer than ever; and at last she'll see that it's her duty to put you out of your misery."

Captain Croome looked at him with admiration, and said, "No one would ever think you were a gentleman, Ruffin: you do know such a lot. But the nuisance is, I'm not much of a hand at writing letters; I can't ever get down exactly what I mean."

The Honourable John Ruffin regarded him with a thoughtful frown; then he said, "Well, of course, I can't be expected to know your exact feelings, but I might be able to give you a tip or two."

"By Jove! If you would!" cried his friend, with sparkling eyes.

"Well, when I've finished my breakfast we'll see about it. But, of course, it's very difficult to know another man's feelings exactly. Still," I know Lady Grizel; and that's very important. I can guess pretty well what she'd like you to say; and, of course, the way to a woman's heart is to say what she wants to hear," said the Honourable John Ruffin, sententiously.

"You're a rum beggar, Ruffin," said Captain Croome, in a tone of admiration.

"Thank you for the tribute," said the Honourable John Ruffin, gravely.

He continued his breakfast in his usual leisurely fashion; and there was a sore struggle between the politeness and the impatience of Captain Croome. His politeness won, for he felt that his friend would permit no attempt to curtail that leisurely meal. Any such attempt would probably cause him to lengthen it.

But at last it came to an end; the Honourable John Ruffin lighted a cigar; and they betook themselves to their task. Slowly and surely they composed and wrote a brief, but melting, letter.

When he had signed it, Captain Croome set down the pen, and said, in a tone of awe, "By Jove! That's perfectly ripping!"

"A few like that ought to soften Lady Grizel's

stern resolution," said the Honourable John Ruffin, dispassionately.

"Rather," said Captain Croome.

"When I do a thing—not that I often do—I like to do it thoroughly. Besides, I do hate that old Tullislaith cat," said the Honourable John Ruffin, with real feeling.

Captain Croome carried off Pollyooly and the Lump to Covent Garden for violets, and thence to Prince's Gate. She was less fortunate in the sale of them than she had been the day before, and had made but a paltry fourpence when Grizel and the dragon appeared.

Grizel no longer wore a despondent air; her eyes were shining, and she walked with a firm and eager step.

When she reached the children, she took the bunch of violets from Pollyooly with a radiant smile, saying, "You're here again, you dear children! I am so pleased to see you!"

The dragon snorted more fiercely than ever, and growled, "Encouraging begging, I call it."

"You weren't asked to call it anything, Symons," said Grizel, coldly.

She picked up the Lump again and kissed him, and asked his name. Then she gave him some chocolate creams which she had brought with her on the chance of their meeting. Then she kissed him again, gave Pollyooly a shilling,

and went on her way, with her dragon and her treasure.

Pollyooly had performed her task, but it was not her lucky day. The kind, but sallow, lady had passed along the other side of the road as she was talking to Lady Grizel; and the sight of the two children recalled painfully to her mind the fits of palpitatioⁿ of the heart which she had suffered after her brief interview with Pollyooly the day before. She called the attention of a leisured policeman to the impropriety of allowing two young children to beg in that select and fashionable quarter.

Finding that she resided in it, the policeman thought it wise to act on her suggestion. He crossed the road to meet Pollyooly as, her task performed, she came briskly along to 'Knights-bridge Barracks.

She was passing him, hardly seeing him, when he pulled her up short with the startling words:

"You've no business to be beggin' 'ere, young 'un. You come along 'o me to the station."

Pollyooly was startled, but not afraid. She had not the Alsatian child's fear of the police: the obese constable of Muttie Deeping had been rather an official decoration of the village than a terror; the kindly joviality of Mr Brown had caused her to regard the London police as mere human beings in blue.

"Please, sir, I wasn't begging," she said.

"Sellin' yi'llets is begging," said the policeman with all the conviction of a man who has an act of Parliament behind his statement.

"But I'm not selling violets, not really. I'm only pretending to. I'm doing something for Captain Croome. He lives in Knightsbridge Barracks," Pollyooly protested.

"You can spin any yarn you want to the Inspector," said the policeman, coldly incredulous. "You come along o' me."

There was plainly nothing else to be done, and Pollyooly and the Lump came along with him; and they had not gone very far before, in spite of the select and fashionable character of the neighbourhood, five rude boys were coming along with them, too, and loudly discussing, in the least complimentary terms, Pollyooly's hair, and the length of the term of imprisonment she would suffer.

Pollyooly was still undismayed, but she was bitterly mortified. This was no position for the housekeeper of the Honourable John Ruffin. She was glad indeed that they were in a neighbourhood in which there was no chance of meeting any of her friends or acquaintances.

So the Messenger of Love came to the Police Station in this ignominious fashion. The policeman preferred his charge; and the Inspector at the desk examined the delinquents with the

proper stern official frown. His brow grew much smoother at the sight of their faces.

It was fortunate that Pollyooly was merely mortified and dismayed and not terrified. She maintained her calm bearing, and answered the questions of the Inspector quite clearly. She lived at 75 the King's Bench Walk in the Temple, and was the housekeeper of the Honourable John Ruffin. He went to the Law Courts every day in a wig and gown. She was not really a flower-seller at all. She was only pretending to be one in order to do something for Captain Croome who lived in Knightsbridge Barracks. She could not say what it was. It was a secret; and she was sure Captain Croome would not like her to tell.

It was a strange tale; and the Inspector was used to strange tales. He was no less used to disbelieving them. At the same time he had had infinite experience in questioning his fellow-creatures; and he knew when they were telling the truth. It seemed to him that Pollyooly was telling the truth.

He scratched his head with a puzzled air, and said, "Do you do anything else besides keep house for Mr Ruffin, and sell violets for Captain Croome?"

"I'm Mr Gedgc-Tomkins's laundress. I get his breakfast and clean his rooms. They're across the landing," said Pollyooly.

The Inspector sat upright in his chair. • He knew the name of that eminent criminal counsel very well indeed. • He had, indeed, been cross-examined by him, for the most part in a furious bellow, and he had by no means forgotten that cross-examination. If Pollyooly's story were true, it behoved him to walk warily indeed in the matter of a child who enjoyed such a powerful employer.

He scratched his head again and said doubtfully, "They look uncommon clean both of them."

"They gets more when they're clean—in this neighbourhood," said the policeman with an air of wide experience. He was still wholly incredulous.

The Inspector rose, went to the telephone, rang up Knightsbridge Barracks, and asked to speak to Captain Croome. Pollyooly heaved a sigh of relief when she heard him ask for him. Captain Croome presently came to the telephone, and the Inspector informed him of the arrest of Pollyooly. As a rule Captain Croome was a strong, silent man, but on the receipt of these tidings he swore at the Metropolitan Police with a fluency that at once assured the Inspector that he had to do with a gentleman. When Captain Croome had fully expressed all his opinions of the Metropolitan Police Force, he said that he would at once motor round to the Police Station; and the Inspector bade Pollyooly sit down.

She perched herself on a chair, with the Lump on her knee, and awaited the coming of the deliverer with a mind at ease. Captain Croome arrived in less than ten minutes, and perhaps it was as well that his temper had calmed down to its usual amiability. He explained Pollyooly's real errand to the Inspector, in private, assuring him that he had not really arrested a flower-seller at all, but the Messenger of Love.

The Inspector received the information with a respectful grin, and gave Captain Croome leave to take the children away with him. But he also declared firmly that Pollyooly must not even pretend to sell violets about Prince's Gate, since the residents in that fashionable district expected the police to keep it select; she must find some other way of delivering her message.

Pollyooly was relieved indeed to escape from the Police Station, and Captain Croome apologised at length for having got her into such a distressing position. He was overjoyed to learn that she had delivered the note before she was arrested. He drove them to the Temple, and, on the way, he bought them the largest box of delicious chocolate creams to be found in a shop.

As he stopped in the King's Bench Walk, frowning a little anxiously, he said, "We shall have to find some other way for you to deliver those notes."

"Oh, Mr Ruffin will easily think of one, sir," said Pollyooly, confidently.

• The next morning, when she brought him his bacon, she told the Honourable John Ruffin of her arrest, and he condoled with her in the most sympathetic fashion.

Then he said in an indulgent tone, "You must try to forgive the Police. They overflow with such a superabundance of furious energy, that they *will* make work for themselves."

"Yes, sir," said Pollyooly, with equal indulgence.

Presently Captain Croome came, with a very cheerful face.

"She's weakenin' a bit—she's weakenin'!" he cried joyously.

"I expect that the letter revealed unsuspected depths in your nature," said the Honourable John Ruffin, with an amiable grin.

"Well, we did get down exactly what I wanted to say," said his simple-minded friend.

As soon as the Honourable John Ruffin had finished his breakfast they addressed themselves to the composition of yet another moving epistle; and Captain Croome professed himself even more pleased with it than with the first.

Then they debated earnestly in what manner Pollyooly should deliver it.

"Well, there's no doubt that this walk in Kensington Gardens is the weak point in

Lady Tulkislaith's scheme of seclusion," said the Honourable John Ruffin, with conviction. "In Kensington Gardens this letter must be delivered; and we must leave the manner of its deliverance to Pollyooly. I think we can; she has an uncommonly fertile mind."

"She has that," said Captain Croome, in warm assent.

"Besides, Lady Grizel will give her the chance. She'll make it," said the Honourable John Ruffin.

"She's bound to," said Captain Croome, hopefully.

"Well, you'd better be in Kensington Gardens, when they come there, Pollyooly. Then just hang about till you get the chance. Don't go too near them; you don't want Argus—Lady Grizel's maid's name is Argus of course—to recognise you," said the Honourable John Ruffin.

"No, sir; but she calls her 'Symons,' sir," said Pollyooly.

"A pet name," said the Honourable John Ruffin.

Pollyooly hesitated, then she said, "Please, sir, can I wear a hat, sir?"

"Certainly—certainly—as many as you like," said the Honourable John Ruffin. "The disguise of a flower-seller is no longer needed. You can wear your prettiest frock if you like. Hurry up, and get it on."

"Thank you, sir," said Pollyooly, gratefully.

"And I think you'd better ask that friend of yours—what's her name? Mrs Brown; yes, Mrs Brown—to take charge of the Lump for you this morning. You had better be unhampered. Speed may be necessary."

Pollyooly's face fell a little; she would have enjoyed taking the Lump in glorious apparel in Captain Croome's motor car. But she said, "Very well, sir," and hurried away.

She was quick changing into her golden frock; then she took the Lump to Mrs Brown in Alsatia. Several of its inhabitants spoke to her about her frock as she passed, in terms which showed envious natures; but she was too busy to give them the appropriate answers.

She left the Lump in charge of Mrs Brown, who was no less delighted to have his society for the morning than overwhelmed by the splendour of Pollyooly's attire, and hurried back to the Temple. She found Captain Croome awaiting her in his car; and he drove her swiftly to Prince's Gate. On the way they stopped and bought a bunch of violets; and Pollyooly hid the moving epistle in the middle of it.

A very cheerful and even excited Grizel, a Grizel who was making up her mind to elope and finding her spirits rising in the process, left the Tullislaith house in Prince's Gate that morning. But when

she came to the entrance to the Gardens without having seen Pollyooly and the Lump, her spirits fell and fell. She had not, however, lost hope, and she kept looking for them with eager eyes. She did not for a while recognise Pollyooly in the little girl in the golden frock who sauntered along the path in front of her and Symons. Then she saw that she had Pollyooly's red hair. Then she saw that the little girl had a bunch of violets in her hand, and her heart began to beat high.

But the little girl did not look round, and Grizel could not be sure that it was Pollyooly. Pollyooly dared not look round, for she feared lest the maid should recognise her, and she could not be sure that Grizel knew it was she. But when she came to a seat embowered in a clump of bushes, without looking round, she pointed to it, left the path, and walked round the clump. To her joy Grizel and Symons sat down on the seat; and through the bushes she saw Symons, who was a keen student of manners, plunge eagerly into the novel she had brought with her, while Grizel, sitting sideways on the seat, with her arm over the back of it, peered quietly into the clump.

But Pollyooly could not go through the clump, contact with London bushes would ruin her frock. She stole very quietly to the corner of the clump and peeped round it. Grizel smiled at her without stirring; Symons remained buried in her novel.

Pollyooly held up the bunch of violets, laid them on the turf at the corner of the clump, and slipped back behind it.

•Grizel said, "I believe there's a bird's nest in the corner of these bushes, Symons."

Symons, an urban soul, grunted indifference. .

Grizel walked to the corner of the clump, picked up the violets, and blew a kiss to the vanishing Pollyooly.

Neither the next morning, nor the morning after, did Captain Croome, to the great disappointment of Pollyooly, come to the Temple. But on the afternoon of the second day there came a letter from him to the Honourable John Ruffin, saying that he had had no word from Grizel.

Pollyooly brought in his tea as the Honourable John was answering it; and he said, "You will be pleased to hear, Pollyooly, that the course of true love is at last running smooth. To-morrow Captain Croome will come in triumph. His lady-love is letting a silent, decorous interval elapse before she assents to his being Young Lochinvar in a taxi-cab."

"Yes, sir," said Pollyooly, with an amiable smile.

Sure enough, the next morning proved him a true prophet. He had eaten but one rasher of bacon when Captain Croome dashed into his room, red with joy, and cried, "She's agreed! She's agreed!"

"Good," said the Honourable John Ruffin calmly. "Sit down and have some breakfast."

"Breakfast! You don't suppose I want any breakfast!" cried Captain Croome, with horrid scorn.

"I did. But I perceive that you are too full of joy to hold food at the moment. You will probably make a better lunch for your abstinence," said the Honourable John Ruffin with philosophic detachment.

"How anybody can think about food, I can't imagine!" cried Captain Croome, with the air of an enthusiast.

"You ought to be able to, with this evidence staring you in the face. I'm not only thinking about it; I'm eating it," said the Honourable John Ruffin, proceeding with his bacon.

By the time he had finished his breakfast, Captain Croome had simmered down just enough to discuss intelligently the manner of Grizel's evasion. He was for motoring her out of London to some quiet Surrey village for their honeymoon. But the Honourable John Ruffin would not hear of it.

"Owing to the efforts of the common road-hog, the motor-car is so easily traced nowadays," he said. "But there is a practically unused station in London, called Fenchurch Street, from which nobody ever goes, though trains do. From there you can go to the village of Pitsea; and it will be

weeks before your pursuers learn that there is a village called Pitsea, much less that you are there. Your first evasion from Prince's Gate will, of course be made in a taxi-cab."

Captain Croome accepted this plan with enthusiasm. He committed as much of it as was necessary to writing, filled up the letter with gratitude and devotion, and Pollyooly delivered it safely to the now impatient Grizel at the corner of the same clump of bushes at which she had delivered the last.

That afternoon the Honourable John Ruffin, devoted to assisting his friend to procure the special licence, by the process of false entry, and the wedding-ring.

At ten o'clock the next morning he said to Pollyooly, "Take your brother to your friend Mrs Brown and leave him in her charge. Then put on your finest attire and prepare to accompany me to the church. Young women in the process of getting married like to have one of their own sex with them; and Lady Grizel knows you. You will therefore be an excellent person to discharge the function of bridesmaid."

Pollyooly made haste to carry out his instructions. She took the Lump to Mrs Brown, and came back and dressed. Since Grizel had already seen her twice in her golden frock, she put on her blue one.

When she came into his sitting-room, the Honourable John Ruffin was opening a large card-board box. He paused to survey Pollyooly with approving eyes, and said, "You are the most trustworthy person of my acquaintance, Mrs Bride. I knew that you had but to be called on to show yourself the ideal bridesmaid, and there you are, the complete thing within the limits of your resources. There is, however, the matter of shoes and gloves, and for those we must hie to St Paul's Churchyard. There are the nearest female shops; and they must serve."

With that he took from the box a glorious bride's bouquet; and they made haste to St Paul's Churchyard. There he bought her shoes, and a pair of gloves to match her frock. Pollyooly came out of the shop enjoying an immense sense of completeness.

They reached the church at a few minutes past eleven; and, after ascertaining that the parson was waiting, the Honourable John Ruffin and Pollyooly took up their stand in the porch.

At that very time an observant person near Prince's Gate might have seen a pretty and manifestly excited girl, accompanied by a fierce maid bearing a fair-sized handbag, which she fondly believed to contain the apparatus for sketching, approaching the entrance to Hyde Park. That observer's interest might have changed to a

mild astonishment when the pretty girl suddenly snatched the handbag from the maid and sprang into a taxi-cab which was slowing down by the Kerb as it met them, and his astonishment might have been changed to amusement by the futility of the action of the maid who bounded, with a rage cries and bared teeth, after the taxi-cab which bore her charge so swiftly away.

Pollyooly and the Honourable John Ruffin had not long to wait. The taxi-cab was quick bringing the flying lovers to the church. Grizel, paling and flushing by turns, was ravishing to the eye. Captain Croome, once out of the steady taxi-cab, presented every appearance of a man who had not the slightest idea whether he was standing on his head or his heels.

The Honourable John Ruffin paid the cab-driver, grasped his friend's arm with a grip of iron, and guided, or rather propelled, him firmly up the aisle. Grizel clutched Pollyooly's hand with the vigour of a drowning man clutching a straw, and held it tight till they reached the altar. During the ceremony she bore herself with a far more composed and intelligent air than did the bridegroom, though she was very pale and he was very red. The Honourable John Ruffin, who hated to leave anything to chance, produced the ring at the right moment, and the pair were firmly wedded.

The ordeal at an end, the bridegroom, under

the spur of his new responsibilities, recovered some control of himself, and, after a short, stern discussion, the Honourable John Ruffin decided that he might trust him to get his bride to Fenchurch Street Station without falling out of the taxi-cab. He hailed one; Grizel kissed Pollyooly with very much the air of a drowning man clutching at yet another straw; the Honourable John Ruffin shook hands with them and wished them happiness; they got into the taxi-cab and glided away.

The Honourable John Ruffin wiped his beaded brow with an air of extreme relief. "Marrying people is a parlous job, Pollyooly," he said, shaking himself like a dog which has just emerged from the ocean.

"Yes, sir," said Pollyooly, in polite assent.

CHAPTER VI

THE IDEA OF THE DUCHESS

POLLYOOLY was pleased to have played so full a part in uniting two loving hearts ; but she could have wished the process longer so that she could have earned more money as Love's Messenger. However, she was not ill content, the affair had swelled her bank account.

It was destined to swell it yet further, for at breakfast on the fourth morning after the elopement the Honourable John Ruffin said to her, " I have news from Captain Croome. So far at any rate we seem to have no reason to reproach ourselves for having married them. They are still happy. It is a very comforting thought."

" Yes, sir," said Pollyooly, gravely.

" Also Captain Croome has sent you a cheque for ten pounds to buy you a brooch or a bracelet, since you acted as bridesmaid, and it is the duty, or rather the privilege, of a bridegroom to make presents to bridesmaids."

Pollyooly smiled her most angelic smile.

" If he had been in London, he would doubtless have bought it for you himself. But, I am strongly

against his coming to London yet awhile—not, indeed, until his mother-in-law has had time to cool. There is a little matter of false entry, which you would not understand, in his way. And though it is not likely that Lady Tullislaith would go to the lengths of breaking off the marriage, it is better that she should not be given the chance of trying to trouble love's young dream by putting pressure on Captain Croome."

"No, sir," said Pollyooly.

The Honourable John Ruffin regarded her thoughtfully for a minute, then he said, "I'm inclined to think that it's a good thing that Captain Croome isn't in Town to give you a bracelet or a brooch. They are not good investments, ten-pound trinkets. I think you'd better add the ten pounds to your bank account. Then, later, if you want to buy a ten-pound bracelet, you can always do it."

"Yes, sir, I'd rather," said Pollyooly, firmly.

Accordingly the cheque was paid into Pollyooly's Post Office Savings Bank account. Then for a while her income was reduced to the eleven shillings a week she received for her work in the Temple, for Hilary Vance no longer required her as a model, since he had finished illustrating the set of stories he had been at work on. Pollyooly was not distressed by this shrinking in her income. She had now a reserve fund on which she and the Lump

could live for nearly two years, even if during them she did not earn a penny; and that was very unlikely indeed.

But Fortune had fallen into the way of enriching Pollyooly, and she could not refrain from the agreeable practice for long at a time.

One afternoon she came back with the Lump from the gardens on the Thames Embankment rather later than usual; and the Honourable John Ruffin called to her from his sitting-room:

"Get tea for two, please, Mrs Bride, and cut the bread and butter thin."

Pollyooly carried the Lump swiftly up to their attic, gave him his woolly lamb and his unmaned horse, ran down the stairs to the kitchen, and set about getting the tea. She was not long about it, and carried it into the sitting-room.

A lady, a beautiful lady, beautifully dressed, sat in the arm-chair facing the door. But she was talking earnestly to the Honourable John Ruffin; and her eyes did not rest on Pollyooly till she was setting the tea on the table. Then they opened wide in a wild amazement; she sprang to her feet, and cried:

"Why—why it's Marion. Whatever is she doing here—in that dress?"

"Oh, no, it isn't Marion. Your partial maternal eyes deceive you. It's Mrs Bride—my housekeeper. I call her *Mrs* Bride, because

she is my housekeeper," said the Honourable John Ruffin, calmly.

"But—but she's the very image of Marion," said the lady, 'staring at Pollyooly with eyes still bewildered.

"By Jove! you're right; she is like Marion—extraordinarily like," said the Honourable John Ruffin, with more animation. "Pollyooly has always reminded me of someone; and I could never make out who it was. 'Of course it's Marion."

"But how is it she's so like Marion?" said the lady.

"One of the mysteries of biology," said the Honourable John Ruffin, carelessly.

"But Marion belongs—in looks at any rate—to my side of the family. She's a red Deeping," said the lady.

"And that's what Pollyooly is! Of course—I see it now!" cried the Honourable John Ruffin, in the triumphant tones of a discoverer. "Her great-aunt was Lady Constantia Deeping's housekeeper at Deeping Hall. Pollyooly came from Muttie Deeping. It's wonderful how the old strains crop up among the village folk.—You're a red Deeping, Pollyooly, that's what you are."

"Yes, sir. Please, sir, what is a red Deeping?" said Pollyooly, knitting her brow.

"The red Deepings have always been renowned

for the fieriness of their hair and their tempers—a truculent, cantankerous set. I must beware, I see. I must certainly beware,” said the Honourable John Ruffin.

“Yes, sir,” said Pollyooly.

“At the same time there are not many people who can boast of having a red Deeping as house-keeper. Indeed, I should not wonder if I were unique,” he said proudly.

“Yes, sir,” said Pollyooly.

She spread a little tea-cloth on the end of the table, and set the tea-things, the bread-and-butter, and the cake on it.

The lady talked quickly to the Honourable John Ruffin of how Pollyooly came to be such an exact red Deeping; the Honourable John Ruffin showed a certain lack of interest in the matter. It was enough for him that old strains did crop up among the village folk. He protested that he was not a scientific man to make the biological researches necessary to the complete elucidation of the fact.

All the while she talked the lady’s eyes never moved from Pollyooly’s face. Then she cut herself short in the middle of a sentence, and cried:

“John, I’ve got a splendid idea!”

“Good heavens!” said the Honourable John Ruffin, in a tone of consternation.

"Yes; I'm going to get Marion all to myself after all," she said triumphantly.

"No, Caroline, you are not," said the Honourable John Ruffin, in a tone of extreme severity, and with a very dark frown. ("You are not even going to try. The wiggling you got from Mr Justice Buffle last time you carried off Marion has for ever deterred you from a second attempt.")

"Has it though?" said the lady; and her fine blue eyes flashed fiercely.

"Yes, it has," said the Honourable John Ruffin with unabated sternness. "You have made up your mind that a duchess cannot give the halfpenny Press of her country occasion to blaspheme twice."

"But this is a dead snip," said the Duchess, confidently. "This time I *am* going to get Marion out of the country."

"You failed before, and you'll fail again," said the Honourable John Ruffin, firmly.

"Oh, no; I shan't—not this time," said the Duchess even more confidently. "And what does it matter if I do? If they catch me, I shall only get the same old wiggling. They daren't send *A* Duchess to prison. The thingumbobs—the middle classes—wouldn't stand it. They'd scream."

"But you *can't* get Marion out of the country. The moment she's missing, Osterley's agents will

wire to the police of every port. I shouldn't wonder if the telegrams are already written out ready for your attempt. They know you so well. You can't do it," the Honourable John Ruffin insisted.

"But the joke is that she'll have been out of the country days and days before she is missed," said the Duchess, with sparkling eyes, and she laughed joyfully.

"How will you work that?" said the Honourable John Ruffin, interested.

The Duchess turned to Pollyooly, who had been too polite to leave the room since she was the subject under discussion, and said briskly, "Would you like twenty pounds—twenty—gold—sovereigns, Pollyooly?"

"Yes, ma'am," said Pollyooly, without the fifth of a second's hesitation.

"Well, if you'll be another little girl for a fortnight, I'll give you twenty gold sovereigns. And you'll live in a beautiful house in the country and have lots of pets, and all you'll have to do will be to pretend that you're another little—my little girl—Lady Marion Ricksborough. You'll have just to keep quiet, and let everybody think that you're her. Do you understand?"

"Yes, ma'am," said Pollyooly, looking at her with shining eyes, before which once more gleamed the vision of Eldorado.

"By Jove! What a game! Oh, woman—woman!" said the Honourable John Ruffin. softly; and, he laughed.

"Do you think that she'll be able to do it without giving the show away?" said the Duchess, looking at him anxiously.

"It's a difficult game of course. But if there's a child in England who can play it, it's Pollyooly," he said with decision. "After all Marion has always seemed to me a very quiet child, and all a little girl is expected to do is to lie low and say nothing."

"She looks intelligent enough," said the Duchess.

"A fertile mind—full of resource," said the Honourable John Ruffin.

"But what about the Lump, sir? I can't leave the Lump for a whole fortnight, sir," said Pollyooly; and the brightness began to fade from her face.

"Who is the Lump?" said the Duchess, quickly.

"Another red Deeping—her little brother, Roger," said the Honourable John Ruffin. "But couldn't your friend, Mrs Brown, take charge of him, Pollyooly?"

"I'll pay her a pound a week," said the Duchess.

"Oh, for a pound a week she'd look after him ever so well," said Pollyooly, in a tone of relief.

"And I'll keep an eye on him too," said the

Honourable John Ruffin. "Mrs Brown can bring him round every morning at breakfast-time to be inspected."

"Thank you, sir," said Pollyooly, gratefully.

"Then that settles that." You arrange it with Mrs Brown. Mind you only tell her that you're going into the country. You mustn't tell her why. You musn't tell anybody why," said the Duchess.

"No, ma'am," said Pollyooly.

"And you mustn't mind if they make a fuss at Ricksborough Court when you tell them who you are. They'll only scold. They won't do anything serious," said the Duchess.

"Why should she tell them? She has only to slip away from Ricksborough, and they'll start hunting for Marion from the time and place at which Pollyooly disappears," said the Honourable John Ruffin.

"That's a ripping idea," said the Duchess, with grateful approval. "They'll get on to false scent after false scent."

"But how are you going to change the children? That will be the awkward part of the business," he said.

"Well, to-morrow, that fussy old creature Mrs Hutton, brings Marion to spend her weekly afternoon with me," said the Duchess. "She takes her back to Ricksborough by the 6.15

from Waterloo. I'll tell Marion to look out for you at Waterloo. As soon as she sees you she gives Mrs Hutton the slip, and you bring her here—"

"Me? Me?" interrupted the Honourable John Ruffin, in a terrible voice. "Me? After all the years I've kept out of your quarrels with Osterley? Me?" And he hammered with both fists on his chest in the resounding fashion of an excited gorilla.

"Yes, of course you'll help me, John," said the Duchess, calmly.

"Blast a promising career—ruin my splendid chance of becoming Lord Chancellor by getting indicted for conspiracy? Never!" he cried; and again he hammered away on his chest.

Pollyooly was much impressed by the action; she had never seen him do it before.

The Duchess seemed unaffected by it, for she only said, calmly, "Of course you'll help. I'm relying on you. No one will ever know."

The Honourable John Ruffin looked at her smiling, animated face, and smiled himself.

"It would be a great game—a great game, Carol ne," he said.

"Won't it?" said the Duchess.

"I should like to see Osterley's face if ever he tumbles to it," he said, and he laughed with veritable glee.

"So should I," said the Duchess, in a vindictive tone.

"Well, well, I've always thought it an infernal shame that you didn't get the custody of Marion. This is a chance of a lifetime to repair a miscarriage of justice. I'm with you, Caroline," he said with a splendid air.

"If you'll stand by me, I'm sure we shall pull it off," said the Duchess, with joyous conviction.

Over their tea they fell to discussing the details, and had perfected the Duchess's plan, when the Honourable John Ruffin clapped his hand to his head, and cried in a tone of horror:

"Good Heavens! I was forgetting! My bacon!"

"Your what?" said the startled Duchess.

"My bacon! Pollywoly is the one person in England—in the world—who can grill bacon properly. I am losing her for a fortnight—a whole fortnight—fourteen breakfasts."

"There are other things besides bacon," said the Duchess, somewhat coldly.

"There are no other things besides bacon—not for breakfast," said the Honourable John Ruffin, bitterly, but with intense conviction. Then, by a violent effort, he pulled himself together, and said, with an air of manly fortitude, "But no matter, I am a martyr—a martyr in the cause

of justice. Oh, that a barrister should prove so faithless to the law ! ”

The Duchess smiled indulgently and said, “ I’m ever so much obliged to you. I am really. Well, I think that’s all that we can do now. Wasn’t it lucky I came to see how you were getting on ? ”

“ Oh, it was ! Fourteen breakfasts ! ” said the Honourable John Ruffin, bitterly.

The Duchess laughed, kissed Pollyooly, and bade her good-bye, and the Honourable John Ruffin, with an air of proud gloom, escorted her out of the Temple, and put her into a taxi-cab.

On his return he said to Pollyooly, who was clearing away the tea, “ You’ve taken on a difficult job, Pollyooly. But I believe that you’re the one child in England who could carry it through. You don’t get flurried.”

“ Yes, sir. I shall try, sir,” said Pollyooly, with the smile of a resolute angel.

“ And if it were a less serious matter than giving back a child to her mother, I wouldn’t let you attempt it,” he said gravely.

“ No, sir,” said Pollyooly.

“ Now, the thing for you to do is to sit tight and keep your eyes wide open—very wide open.”

“ Yes, sir,” said Pollyooly; and she opened her eyes very wide, as if to practise.

“ You let the other people do the talking.”

“ Yes, sir; I hope I shan’t have to tell a lot

of lies," said Pollyooly, anxiously, with a sudden remembrance of the teaching of her Aunt Hannah.

"You won't if you let the other people do the talking."

"Yes, sir," said Pollyooly with an air of relief.

The Honourable John Ruffin gazed at her thoughtfully: "It's a wonderful thing how some people fill long-felt wants and others don't," he said gravely.

"Yes, sir," said Pollyooly, in polite assent.

"Now look at me; I was educated at Eton, and Balliol College, Oxford, yet, I assure you, Pollyooly, that never once has anyone asked me to act as changeling for them," he said sadly.

"No, sir," said Pollyooly, with grave sympathy.

CHAPTER VII.

POLLYOOLY PLAYS THE CHANGELING

POLLYGOLY was very busy next morning. She arranged with Mrs Brown that she should take charge of the Lump for two weeks at a pound a week, and also that she should act during that period as laundress to the Honourable John Ruffin and Mr Gedge-Tomkins. .

Naturally Mrs Brown was exceedingly curious to know the reasons of Pollyooly's so sudden journey, but all she learned was that Pollyooly was going into the country to do something for a lady, and her mission was secret and might not be told.

"It's wunnerful how you do git jobs, Pollyooly," said Mrs Brown, in a marvelling tone; and with that she let the matter rest.

At breakfast she recommended Mrs Brown to the Honourable John Ruffin, and on that recommendation he accepted her.

But he shook his head and said sadly, "She will do her best, I've no doubt. But I dare not think of my bacon. I shall buy a calendar and mark off the days till your return."

After breakfast he said, "And now I'll go and break the news of your departure to Mr Gedge-Tomkins, I hope he will not weep, for I have read in many books that a strong man's tears are terrible."

"I don't think that Mr Gedge-Tomkins will cry, sir," said Pollyooly, hopefully. "I shouldn't think he ever cried."

"Let us hope not," said the Honourable John Ruffin, gloomily. "But I shall cry. I shall cry on to my bacon at breakfast to-morrow morning. I shall salt it with my tears."

"I've told Mrs Brown how you like it done, sir," said Pollyooly.

"What is telling?" said the Honourable John Ruffin sternly. "Bacon-grillers are like poets—*nascuntur non fiunt*."

"It's only for a fortnight, sir," said Pollyooly.

"Only—ha, ha! Only!" said the Honourable John Ruffin, in a deep, tragical voice.

He went into the chambers of Mr Gedge-Tomkins, and knocked at his sitting-room door. Mr Gedge-Tomkins bade him enter in a gruff voice, and surveyed him, on his entrance, with cold, disapproving eyes.

"Good morning," said the Honourable John Ruffin, in his most amiable tone. "I've arranged for Mary Bride to get away into the country for a fortnight. She's looking pale, and fresh air

will do her good. I hepe you don't mind. It was all arranged on the spur of the moment, and there was no time to consult you."

"M'm, what am I to do for a laundress?" said Mr Gedge-Tomkins, not at all ungraciously.

"Well, I have a very respectable woman coming in to look after me. She could do for you too, if you like."

"Does she drink?" said Mr Gedge-Tomkins, quickly, as a vision of Mrs Meeken rose before the eyes of his mind.

"Certainly not. She's the wife of a policeman," said the Honourable John Ruffin, with decision.

"Is she? Then if you get a chance, you might hint to her that I do not mind her drinking my whisky—in moderation—but I do object to her watering it," said Mr Gedge-Tomkins, cynically.

"Certainly—certainly—I'll make it quite clear to her," said the Honourable John Ruffin, readily.

"Right. And I'll pay half Pollyooly's trip," said Mr Gedge-Tomkins, gruffly.

"Oh, a lady's paying all that," said the Honourable John Ruffin, cheerfully. "It's very good of you not to put any obstacle in the way of her going."

"Not at all—not at all," said Mr Gedge-Tomkins, gruffly.

The Honourable John Ruffin returned to his

chambers and informed Pollyooly of his colleague's urbanity, and when she brought in breakfast to Mr Gedge-Tomkins, she thanked him herself. He said that he hoped that the change would do her good, and, as he was starting for the Law Courts, he gave her five shillings and gruffly bade her buy something useful with it.

Pollyooly was touched by this mark of his appreciation, for he had always been silent with her. She thought it well to take the money with her in case she should in some emergency need it.

At three o'clock, that afternoon she took the Lump to Mrs Brown and left him with her. It was indeed a wrench parting with him, for they had never before been separated for as long as four hours at a time since the day he was born. Though she knew that Mrs Brown would look after him as the apple of her eye, and she had no fears for his well-being, she came away from him with a very sad heart, hating the need to earn twenty pounds, which severed them. The shining vision of Eldorado was blurred.

At a quarter to six the Honourable John Ruffin set out to Waterloo Station. At five minutes to six the Duchess arrived at his chambers, very anxious, nervous, excited. She walked up and down the room, and at intervals she said, "Oh, I do hope he won't make a mess of it!" . . . "I hope nothing's going wrong!" . . . "That clock

in the tower there moves slower than any clock I ever saw ! ”

Pollyooly, confident of the wisdom and resource of the Honourable John Ruffin, stood at the window unruffled and serene.

She was very patient with the excited Duchess, and at intervals she said, “ Mr Ruffin is sure to bring her.”

In her heart of hearts she was wishing that he might make a mess of it. She would lose the twenty pounds indeed, but she would not be parted from the Lump.

Then at a quarter past six a taxi-cab came fast along Paper Buildings, and in it she saw the Honourable John Ruffin and a little girl.

“ Here they are, ma’am,” she said in a tone of resignation.

The Duchess rushed to the window, saw the Honourable John Ruffin and Lady Marion descend from the taxi-cab, and ran half-way down the stairs to meet them.

Then Pollyooly’s double came into the sitting-room, and the two children stared at one another seriously, with the keenest curiosity.

At once the Honourable John Ruffin set them side by side to assure himself of the likeness.

“ By Jove, it’s wonderful ! ” he cried. “ Wonderful ! ”

The likeness was wonderful. By some curious

freak of nature Marion was Pollyooly's double. She was the same length, breadth, and thickness; she carried herself in the same fashion; she had Pollyooly's red hair to a shade; she had her white skin and blue eyes; she had her delicate features. It was only when you looked at her closely that you perceived that she was but an inferior copy of Pollyooly. Her hair lacked the lustre of Pollyooly's: it was duller and less abundant. Her skin was not of so fine a texture as Pollyooly's, and lacked its translucence. Her eyes were blue, but not of the intense deep blue of Pollyooly's. Her features were like, but Nature had moulded them with a clumsier hand; and she lacked wholly Pollyooly's angelic expression. But you could only see these differences by a close scrutiny of the children together. Take either of them apart, and she was Pollyooly, or Lady Marion Ricksborough, according as you found her in the King's Bench Walk, or at Ricksborough Court.

Having once satisfied themselves of the likeness, the Honourable John Ruffin and the Duchess lost no time. With the Duchess as maid, the children had exchanged every stitch of their clothing in less than five minutes. Then Pollyooly was truly Lady Marion Deeping, and Marion was Pollyooly; there was no doubt about it. The Duchess kissed Pollyooly, and wished her good luck. The Honourable John Ruffin hurried her down the

stairs, out of the Temple into Fleet Street, into a taxi-cab, and they drove off to Waterloo.

As the cab started he said, "Everything has gone right so far. All you've got to do at the station is to stand still; and a policeman will recognise you and take you to Mrs Hutton. Mrs Hutton's your maid—you'll call her 'Hutton.' Then you understand what you've got to do is to sit tight, and let the other people do the talking."

"Yes, sir," said Pollyooly.

"Marion's a fairly silent child, I believe, so no one will notice any change," he said thoughtfully. "And if she isn't there, as a test, they'll hardly see that she has suddenly—very suddenly—grown much better looking."

"No, sir," said Pollyooly.

"But, of course, you won't be able to keep silent all the time, and when you do have to speak, give yourself airs—plenty of airs. Remember that you're no longer Mrs Brade, my housekeeper, but Lady Marion Ricksborough, the daughter of a Duke," he said earnestly.

"Yes, sir," said Pollyooly, firmly.

"In fact, be what you are—a red Deeping. Be a scarlet Deeping, if you can."

"Yes, sir, I will. I—I—should like to," said Pollyooly with a resolute smile.

"That's the right spirit," he said in a tone of warm approval. "And about getting away. I'll

meet you at half-past two at the top of Ricksborough home wood. You'll easily find out where that is. I shall wait till half-past four. If you're not there that day, I shall come the day after that, and the day after that."

"I shall be there the first day, sir," said Pollyooly, with her resolute air, thinking of the Lump.

"I think you will. But don't take any risks," he said, smiling at her. "And one last word: make the best of the country and the fresh air, and put on weight."

"Yes, sir," said Pollyooly.

Half-way between Waterloo Bridge and the station he stopped the cab; and they got out of it. She walked on, and he followed her, keeping twenty yards behind.

In this order they came into the station; and near the booking-office she stopped.

She had stood there barely three minutes, when one of the railway policemen gazed at her earnestly, bounded up to her, and cried: "Are you Lady Ricksborough—Lady Marion Ricksborough?"

"What business is it of yours?" said Pollyooly, truculently. "Where's my maid—Hutton?"

"I beg pardon, your ladyship, but we've been untin' everywhere for your ladyship. If your ladyship will come to the superintendent's offices, you'll find your maid," said the policeman.

Pollyooly followed him haughtily.

As he entered the superintendent's office, he cried triumphantly, "I've found 'er! 'ere she is!"

Clerks sprang from their desks and gathered round her. The superintendent, himself leapt lithely out of an inner office, and asked her where she had been.

"Looking at London," said Pollyooly, curtly.

Seeing that for a long while she had not set eyes on any other portion of the earth's surface, this was literally true.

The policeman was dispatched to the North station, whither Mrs Hutton had repaired in the course of her search. The clerks gloated over Pollyooly with the respectful admiration induced in them by her rank, then they went back to their work. Pollyooly sat down and waited for her maid.

In a few minutes Mrs Hutton, a buxom, round-faced woman of fifty summers, arrived, purple, flustered, and vociferous. She enlarged on her terrors and exertions, on the fact that they had missed their train, on her ignorance of what his Grace would say when he heard of his daughter's escapade. Then she inquired what Pollyooly had been doing during the half hour she had been missing.

"Looking at London," said Pollyooly, with cold curtness.

They had not long to wait for a train, and

Pollyooly enjoyed the journey through the country exceedingly. She had not known how much she had been missing it during the two years she had lived in London. Once or twice indeed the prettier pieces of scenery were a little blurred by the tears which rose to her eyes. If only the Lump were with her!

Half-way to Ricksborough, Mrs. Hutton, who seemed to have at last recovered from the shock, told the entirely indifferent Pollyooly that if she behaved very nicely during the next three days, she would not tell the Duke of her escapade at Waterloo. But had Pollyooly behaved like a Borgia during those three days Mrs. Hutton would not have told of it, for she would have got into serious trouble herself for letting her charge give her the slip. Indeed, she would certainly have been discharged.

In this way it came about that neither the Duke of Osterley nor Lady Salkeld, the widowed sister who kept house for him, knew that there had been any break in the continuity of their possession of Marion; and Miss Marlow, Marion's governess, enjoyed an equal ignorance.

Pollyooly enjoyed the drive in the motor-car from the station to the Court, even more than the railway journey. But for all her wonted courage, she went up the broad steps, and into the great hall, on faltering feet.

Only a butler and footman were in it, and they looked at her with careless eyes. If they had been men of any observation, they would have been surprised by the behaviour of the half-dozen dogs of different sizes who were in the hall. They all came forward to greet Pollyooly, but they greeted her with the cautious sniffs of investigators, rather than with the tail-wagging of intimate friends. Fortunately, neither the butler, nor the footman, nor Mrs Hutton, were observant persons.

Pollyooly seemed in no hurry to go to her own suite of rooms; and that was hardly to be wondered at, since she did not know that she had a suite of rooms to go to, much less where it was. She lingered till Mrs Hutton had given the butler her impressions of the condition of London that day, then she followed her upstairs, and, without knowing it, that good woman acted as guide to that suite.

There, in her sitting-room, Pollyooly found Miss Marlow, her governess—a mild and sentimental-looking lady of thirty-five—who greeted her tepidly, and enlarged on the discomfort of a journey to London on such a hot day. Mindful of the advice of the Honourable John Ruffin, Pollyooly let her talk, an exercise to which she seemed not at all disinclined.

Pollyooly escaped from her presently, and went out into the gardens, where she would have

been entirely happy but for the thought that the Lump was not there to share her pleasure. She wandered about them, full of delight and admiration. Three dogs, of shapes strange to her, joined her and accompanied her on her wanderings.

Later, a footman summoned her in to her supper; and at the summons she realised that she had already derived a very keen appetite from the country air. The three dogs, who had been growing more and more respectful and friendly, accompanied her to her suite of rooms.

Miss Marlow was awaiting her, and at the sight of her following she said in some surprise, "Why, I thought you didn't like dogs, Marion."

Pollyooly hesitated a moment, then she said, "I've changed my mind."

Miss Marlow graced the meal with a gentle flow of conversation, in which she did not seem to expect Pollyooly to take any active part. Pollyooly confined herself to saying "yes," or "no," when Miss Marlow paused.

It seemed to her indeed that conversation at such an excellent meal, with foods so varying and so appetising to tax her powers of appreciation, was somewhat superfluous.

She went to bed soon after supper and was up and out betimes. She left the trim gardens for the home wood, and was happier than ever exploring it. Five dogs accompanied her, and

fortunately the keepers had gone home to breakfast. Hunger informed her of her own breakfast hour; she breakfasted with Miss Marlow, and made a hearty and delicious meal. Never before had it fallen to her lot to spread jam on her bread-and-butter, as much jam as ever she wanted—and such jam. Miss Marlow had indeed reason to remark on the excellence of her appetite.

At ten o'clock lessons began, and there Pollyooly made her first slip. She had passed all seven standards at the Muttie Deeping school, and it never occurred to her that the daughter of a Duke would not possess the learning she had acquired. She astonished Miss Marlow by a display of knowledge for which there was really no accounting. Fortunately, Miss Marlow was not intelligent, and she set down this sudden advance to some unexpected and, indeed, uncommon development of her charge's intellect. But her astonishment warned Pollyooly of her mistake; and she proceeded to move along the path of learning at a much slower pace.

After lessons she went for a walk with Miss Marlow and six dogs. The dogs relieved the dullness of Miss Marlow's vapid, but unceasing, talk. Pollyooly lunched with Lady Salkeld, who greeted her with a tepidness like Miss Marlow's, and since some friends had motored over to lunch paid no more attention to her. Pollyooly was

relieved by this lack of attention; it enabled her to devote all her mind to the food and her table manners, which, thanks to her Aunt Hannah's acquaintance with the customs of the Great, were good enough to pass muster. Tea and supper she took with the unobservant Miss Marlow in her own sitting-room. She went to bed that night with an easy mind, so far, she was sure, no suspicion whatever that she was a changeling had entered anyone's mind.

The next day, also, nothing occurred to disquiet her. It was not unnatural, for the last thing that would occur to anyone was that Nature had been peculiarly prolific of Lady Marion Ricksboroughs. Besides, no one had been greatly interested in Marion. It was not as if she had been a boy and heir to the dukedom. Pollyooly began to understand that her double had led a somewhat lonely life.

This general lack of interest in her made her task much easier; none the less, it was a difficult one for a child of twelve. There were so many things to learn—the names of the dogs and the servants, of Lady Salkeld's cats; her way about the Court; the places in which Marion kept her possessions. She had to learn them without letting anyone perceive that she was learning them. The need for perpetual wariness was trying.

Now and again, of course, in spite of the faithfulness with which she followed the instructions of the Honourable John Ruffin to let other people do the talking, she did make a slip, displaying an ignorance of some "familiar" fact which should have astounded those about her. It was fortunate indeed, that she had to do with unobservant persons. The servants were her chief danger; and she felt it. By the circumstances of their life they had to be more observant. But with them the Honourable John Ruffin's other injunction to be a red Deeping and give herself airs stood her in good stead. They, too, were not interested in Marion, and though they noticed this change, it was not of a kind to awake their suspicions. With them Pollyooly was at times almost truculent.

More than once, in the secrecy of the housekeeper's room, Mrs Hutton said gloomily, "I don't know what's come to that there Marion. She's taken to giving herself such airs that there's no doing anything with her. The way she orders me about, she might be twenty."

"Lady Marion's a red Deeping; and they're like that. And, what's more, she's getting to the age when it comes out," said the housekeeper sagely.

In spite of the trying need for continuous wariness, Pollyooly was enjoying her stay in the

country beyond words. Her pleasure was only marred by the frequent thought that the Lump was not with her to share it, the desire for him was persistent. She would have liked also a companion of her own age, but the dogs proved fairly efficient substitutes. They attached themselves to her to a dog. Firmly and with devotion, big dogs and little dogs, they accompanied her on all her excursions.

They were not, indeed, welcome in the woods, and were the occasion of her displaying her best red Deeping manner to an under-keeper, who had the fond idea that so much noise was not good for his sacred, but nesting, pheasants.

Pollyooly felt very strongly that it was the inalienable right of a daughter of a duke to disturb nesting pheasants if she wanted to, and before she had done with him the keeper felt it too. The feeling that she was the daughter of a duke was growing on her and changing her. Before coming to Ricksborough Court she had always been able, without an effort, to assume a most truculent air; but for the most part, she had looked a gentle, angel child. Now though she remained the angel child, under the influence of the excellent food and fresh air, she was growing the angel child with an air of serene confidence in herself and her destiny.

It was on the fifth day of her stay that a new

disquieting figure, the first real menace to her security, came to the Court. The Duke was to arrive at four o'clock; and Mrs Hutton dressed Pollyooly in a somewhat too elaborate frock of amber silk to have tea with him and Lady Salkeld.

When Pollyooly came into the drawing-room, she found not only the Duke, but also his nephew and heir, Lord Roland Ricksborough, a dark, good-looking boy of fourteen, of an almost girlish delicacy of complexion. The Duke, a dapper little thin-lipped man of thirty-five with a small, unhappy drab moustache with which he for ever fidgetted, gave her an indifferent glance and protruded two limp fingers. Pollyooly shook them gingerly. Ronald shook hands with her in a somewhat perfunctory and condescending fashion.

Then another newcomer, a fox-terrier, came forward and sniffed at her skirts with an air of inquiring doubt.

Their elders, who were talking to one another, did not observe it, but Ronald said in a tone of great astonishment, "Why, what's the matter with Wiggs? He's pretending he doesn't know Marion."

It seemed to Pollyooly that now, if ever, was the time for airs; she drew herself and said scornfully, "He's a silly dog."

"That he isn't! He's one of the most intelligent dogs in the world, and you know it as well as I do," said Ronald, hotly.

"He's not intelligent now, anyhow," said Pollyooly, coldly.

"He must be kidding," said Ronald, but he looked with a puzzled air from Wiggs to Pollyooly and from Pollyooly to Wiggs.

Pollyooly felt that she would have to be very careful indeed in his presence, and she made up her mind to have as little to do with him as possible. At tea she only gave the shortest answer to his questions, and seemed to be sulking. After tea she changed her frock and slipped away to the home wood.

But she soon learned that it would be difficult to avoid him, for he took his breakfast, tea, and supper with her and Miss Marlow, and at lunch he sat beside Pollyooly.

To remain silent was foreign to his nature, and she found his talk awkward to deal with, for it was full of allusions to events which had happened during his last holidays, in which they had both taken part. Sometimes she extricated herself successfully from her difficulties, sometimes she did not. He fell into the way of regarding her with a puzzled air which sometimes disquieted her exceedingly.

One morning at breakfast, after one of her

failures, he said to Miss Marlow: "Marion's memory's getting jolly bad."

"Then it's like your manners," said Pollyooly, exercising the somewhat dangerous gift of retort she had acquired during her two years' residence in Alsatia.

"Now last holidays you'd never have said a thing like that. You weren't a bit cheeky," said Ronald, and he looked at her with the disquieting, puzzled air.

"Cheeky yourself," said Pollyooly, with some heat.

"I think you've changed tremendously," said Ronald. "Don't you think she's changed, Miss Marlow?"

"I think her intelligence is improving," said Miss Marlow.

"I don't think it's only that," said Ronald, doubtfully. "She looks different. Her skin is clearer and her eyes are bluer."

"We all change," said Miss Marlow, sapiently. Pollyooly said nothing.

She grew more and more alive to her danger, and she found him more and more difficult to avoid. The fancy took him, in default of other companionship, to spend more and more of his time with her, and the fancy was much strengthened by her plain desire that he should do nothing of the kind. That desire also sur-

prised him, for he had been used to regard Marion as a respectful admirer. Pollyooly could not indeed make it as clear as she would have liked, that she did not desire his companionship, her natural politeness forbade it.

It was not only the danger that made her shun him, it was also her deeply ingrained distrust of boys in general. To her they were a savage tribe, who pulled your hair when you were not looking, or when you were—a tribe which rudely called you "Ginger."

As she came to see more of Ronald she was greatly surprised to find that he lacked the barbarous hair-pulling habit. To her even greater surprise, he was most of the time courteous. She was the less surprised therefore to find herself, at the end of a couple of days of his society, regarding an indubitable boy with approval, even with liking. She began to find the task of deceiving him not only trying but also somewhat ungrateful.

For his part, he was most agreeably surprised by the changes in his cousin. She had acquired an untiring activity which she had before utterly lacked; she displayed a very quick and observant intelligence. She entered into all his pursuits, except riding, with a zest which made her an admirable comrade.

But for all Pollyooly's wariness, when they

were together, Ronald's face was never for long free from its puzzled air. She could not help the occasional display of an astounding ignorance. Above everything the behaviour of the dogs puzzled him.

One day he said, "It's no good. I can't understand these dogs: You used to say that you didn't like dogs; but the thing was that the dogs didn't like you. They didn't find you sporting enough."

"Well, now they do. We all change, Miss Marlow said so," said Pollyooly, quickly.

"Yes; but such a change in such a little time. You were quite different last time I was here," said Ronald, frowning.

Pollyooly said nothing. She seemed quite uninteresting in the matter.

"And there are the other things," said Ronald, looking at her with an almost worried air.

Pollyooly did not ask what they were; her limpid blue eyes were scanning the surrounding country.

Sometimes he would deliberately set a trap for her, and as often as not he caught her. His suspicions grew and grew, but he did not confide them to anyone. Even if he had been willing to get Pollyooly into trouble, as he was not, he was very strongly of the opinion that all the grown-ups would laugh at him for such suspicions. After

all, that Marion should be someone else was incredible.

Then he attained certainty. One afternoon they had wandered into a part of the estate new to Pollyooly, and they came out of a wood to see on the hillside, half a mile away, a windmill with whirling sails.

"Whatever's that?" cried Pollyooly, startled out of her caution by the sight. There had been no windmills in the country round Muttie Deeping.

"Whatever's what?" said Ronald.

"That thing turning round," said Pollyooly, pointing to the windmill.

"That settles it," said Ronald, throwing himself down on the turf. "If you were Marion, you'd have seen that windmill a dozen times, and the windmill at Wootton a hundred times. You didn't know that, it was a windmill, you're not Marion."

Pollyooly opened her mouth to declare that she was Marion, but shut it without uttering a word. Thanks to her strict training, it was always hard for her to lie; she found it almost impossible to lie to Ronald.

She looked round the landscape rather wildly, seeking inspiration, then she said, "Well, something must have gone wrong with my memory."

"Rats! You're not Marion and it's no good

pretending you are—to me. Who are you?" said Ronald, firmly.

Pollyooly said nothing; she scowled horribly at the innocent windmill.

"Now, out with it." If you tell me straight away I won't split. "I give you my word," said Ronald, earnestly.

Pollyooly shook her head, but her puckered brow smoothed a little.

"Now, come on. What's the good of keeping a secret which isn't a secret?" said Ronald, in a tone half pleading, half commanding.

"It all comes of not letting you do all the talking. But it was so sudden—that thing going round," said Pollyooly, ruefully. "You won't really tell anyone?"

"Not a soul," said Ronald.

"Well, I can't tell you who I am, because I mustn't, but I'm not Marion. I'm only here in her place for a while."

"Where is she?" said Ronald.

"I don't know where she is, but she has run away with her mother—ever so far—where they'll never, never be found. I'm just staying here till they've got there safely."

"By Jove, but this is a game! It's like a story in a book. You do have luck," said Ronald, enviously.

"Yes; but it isn't very comfortable—some-

times. "I'm always being afraid of being found out," said Pollyooly.

"Oh, there's no fear of that—not here. They're not sharp enough," said Ronald, with a touch of contempt in his tone.

"No; they're not very sharp," said Pollyooly, in a tone of satisfaction. "It's a good job they're not."

"No; it took me to find it out," said Ronald, with pardonable self-satisfaction.

"And the windmill," said Pollyooly.

"Oh, I should have found it out without the windmill," said Ronald, confidently.

"Perhaps you would," said Pollyooly, politely.

"Really, I knew it all the time, only it was so extraordinary," said Ronald.

He lay still gazing at her for a while, then he said reflectively, "Well, I'm glad that kid has got away to her mother. She was rather a rotter; and I never cared much for her, though I believe I'm going to marry her when we grow up. She had a poor time here."

"Fancy having a poor time in a beautiful place like this! She must have been silly!" cried Pollyooly, in amazement.

"I said she was rather a rotter. But what am I to call you? I'm not going to call you Marion. She's rather set *pré* against the name."

Pollyooly considered a while. It seemed safe

to impart her Christian name, and she told him that it was Mary, adjuring him not to call her by it before anyone.

"No fear," he said; "and if I did, they'd never notice. Why, they never noticed that you were worth two of Marion, and ever so much prettier."

"Am I?" said Pollyooly, with some gratification.

"Now, it's nothing to get vain about; you can't help it," said Ronald, in an admonitory tone.

"I'm not going to," said Pollyooly, firmly.

"It's a funny thing that when you grow up you never seem to notice anything. You'd have thought that somebody would have spotted you," he said meditatively.

"They don't notice much," said Pollyooly.

"It's often a jolly good thing they don't," said Ronald, smiling.

He went on to inquire about her plans; and his face fell when he learnt that she was only going to stay a few days longer. He begged her to stay till the end of his holidays, pointing out that it would make it much safer for Marion if she did. But Pollyooly assured him that that was the term fixed, and in her heart of hearts she would not have had it longer. Pleasant as the Court was, she wanted to get back to the Lump. Her uneasy feeling that it was not right that she

should be having this splendid time in the country while the Lump was in stuffy London, was growing stronger and stronger, though not strong enough to prevent her enjoying the splendid time.

Ronald's discovery made it even more pleasant, for it set them on far more intimate terms with one another as sharers of a great secret. He was no longer condescending with her; he felt that the fact that she was playing the chief part in such a difficult game relieved her to a great degree from the disability, under which she suffered, of being a girl.

Now, too, that she no longer needed to be so much on her guard, she talked to him more freely, and proved so lively and sympathetic a companion that he found his ideas on the subject of girls changing utterly. They became the closest of comrades, inseparable. Miss Marlow was deeply, romantically touched by the fact that so early in life such a warm sympathy prevailed between two beings who were destined later to be welded together by the marriage bond.

Naturally, when the morning of the fatal day of parting arrived they were both sad. Quite unconsciously they spent it in a pilgrimage to the haunts in which they had most enjoyed themselves. At the end of the morning they were coming along one of the shrubberies towards the house when the lunch-bell rang.

Pollyooly stopped short and said :

"We'd better say good-bye now. I've got to slip away directly after lunch. You'd better not see who I go with, in case it's found out some day, and you're asked questions."

"I suppose I'd better not," said Ronald, gloomily; and he put his hands in his pocket and kicked at the gravel.

They gazed at one another awkwardly, then he said, "Well, you're the jolliest kid I ever came across."

"I didn't know boys could be as nice as you," said Pollyooly, with conviction.

There was another rather awkward silence, then, with a determined, almost heroic air, Ronald stepped forward, put his arm clumsily round Pollyooly's shoulders, and kissed her full on the lips.

They both gasped and flushed; then with one accord they turned and walked quickly towards the house, saying nothing, looking shame-faced.

On the top of the steps Pollyooly paused and said softly, "Good-bye, Ronnie."

"Good-bye, old girl," said Ronald.

The food at lunch did not taste to her as nice as usual, though there was really no fault to find with her appetite. Ronald wore a gloomy air, and was captious with Lady Salkeld. As soon as lunch was over Pollyooly went up to her bedroom

and changed into the frock and hat and shoes in which she had come to the Court. Then, avoiding the servants, she slipped out of the house by a side door into one of the long shrubberies. Once screened by it, she ran swiftly along it, and then up the sloping lawn to the gate of the home wood.

At the gate of the wood she turned for a last look at the Court and saw Ronald standing on the lawn before the drawing-room windows, with his hands in his pockets, gazing up at her. She waved her hand to him, and he waved his. Then she went through the gate into the wood. She did not find breathing quite easy for a minute or two, and the aisle of the wood was a little blurred to her vision, but, of course, she did not cry.

She went swiftly through the wood. As she came out of the gate at the end of it the clock over the stables of the Court struck half-past two, and thirty yards down the road a motor car was coming slowly up to the gate.

The Honourable John Ruffin, masked by his goggles, was driving it, and on the seat beside him, placid and serene, sat the Lump. At the sight of him Pollyooly gave a little cry, rushed down the road, sprang into the car, caught him up and kissed and hugged him furiously.

The Honourable John Ruffin smiled, and said, "I thought you'd be dying to see him. But take

him into the tonneau, and put on the goggles and the cloak on the seat. Cover up all your hair with the hood."

Pollyooly made haste to transfer herself and the Lump to the tonneau and slip on the hooded cloak and the goggles.

"You'll do. No one will recognise us," said the Honourable John Ruffin, and he set the car going.

For a long time Pollyooly was busy with the gurgling Lump, assuring herself that he had not suffered for lack of her care, trying to ascertain the degree of his joy at being restored to her. At last she settled back in the tonneau with a sigh of content. It had been hard to leave the Court, but, after all, the Lump was the Lump.

CHAPTER VIII

POLLYOOLY FINDS A CAREER

IT was nearly five o'clock before they reached the Temple, and the Honourable John Ruffin bade Pollyooly give the Lump his tea in the sitting-room that he himself might forthwith hear the story of her stay at Ricksborough Court. She was not long getting the tea and beginning her narrative.

The Honourable John Ruffin listened to her with a pleased smile till she came to Ronald's discovery of her secret, then he frowned, and said, "That's awkward. It means that sooner or later they'll find out the trick we played on them, and then there'll be fine alarms and excursions."

"Oh, no, sir. They'll never find out. Ronald will never tell," said Pollyooly, confidently.

"He won't mean to. But he's young," said the Honourable John Ruffin, incredulous.

Pollyooly went on with her story, and when she came to the end of it he congratulated her on the success with which she had played her difficult part. Then he said, seriously:

"And how did the people at the Court strike you, Mrs Bride—your revered, but temporary, sire, the Duke, your amiable aunt, your intelligent governess, and the visitors?"

Pollyooly gazed at him earnestly and knitted her brow in the effort to get her impressions clear; then she said, "I thought they were very quiet, sir."

"Empty—quite empty," said the Honourable John Ruffin.

"Yes, sir; that was it," said Pollyooly, with an angel smile.

"Very different from Mr Gedge-Tomkins talking to a common bailiff, or Mr Vance talking about a new idea, or Mr James talking to Mr Vance about Mr Vance's new idea? Eh?" he said, smiling.

"Yes, sir; quite different," said Pollyooly.

"Ah, Mrs Bride, I fear we are spoiling you for the common life. You will grow up to expect too much from your fellow-creatures—too many brains. However, it can't be helped," he said mournfully.

"No, sir. I don't mind, sir," said Pollyooly, in a soothing tone.

"You're an obliging creature, Mrs Bride," said the Honourable John Ruffin.

Next morning he seized his *Morning Post* with the liveliest interest, but there was no word in its columns about the vanishing of Lady Marion

Ricksborough. For the next five mornings its columns were no less barren. Then on the sixth morning its Personal column was headed by an advertisement from the Duke's lawyers, offering £500 reward for information which would lead to her recovery.

When Pollyooly brought in his bacon, the Honourable John Ruffin said joyously, "Your revered, but temporary, sire, the Duke, has put the fat in the fire with a lavish hand."

"Yes, sir," said Pollyooly.

"He's offering £500 reward for your double, and he's going to have the time of his life with all the amateur detectives of England, Scotland, Ireland, and gallant little Wales," said the Honourable John Ruffin, with immense delight.

The Duke had indeed opened the sluices; and since there was little doing at home or abroad, the newspapers took the matter up with fiery energy. Pollyooly's quiet feat gave the presses of the world columns upon columns of excited narrative and conjecture; it drew from them scores of pictures of the missing child, and every person and place connected with her. The Honourable John Ruffin would read interesting, but perhaps fatuous, extracts to her as he ate his breakfast, and he brought her a collection of the illustrated weeklies that she might have the pictures of the affair.

Pollyooly was very pleased to have the pictures, because many of them were of Ricksborough Court, but her interest in the matter soon waned. It was fortunate that only the cheaper illustrated papers circulated in Alsatia; and in those the portraits of Marion were unvarying and not to be recognised. Had the more expensive weeklies circulated in it, it is Lombard Street to a China orange that the solicitors of the Duke of Osterley would have had the vain task of 'investigating Pollyooly's past.

In nine days the clamour died down. The newspapers and the amateur detectives found other affairs no less important to the community; and the Honourable John Ruffin declared that the worst was over, that the only danger now was the splitting of Ronald, and that he thought that that too was past.

Pollyooly had settled down quietly to the even tenour of her life. She often thought of Ronald; she sometimes longed to be in the green coolness of the Ricksborough woods with the Lump. Then one afternoon she had just taken his tea to the Honourable John Ruffin and retired to the Lump in their attic, when there came a knocking on the door of the chambers. She went down and opened it, and there, on the landing, stood a dazzling vision—a lady in a confection of scarlet and yellow, in which only a beauty as dark and

as brilliant as hers could dare to deck itself. So fine, however, was her colouring, so dark her eyes and hair, that even those primary colours seemed hardly to give them their full value.

She smiled with pleasure at the sight of Pollyooly's angel face, in its frame of red hair, and said in a delightful, eager voice :

"You're the little girl Mr Hilary Vance, the painter, calls 'Pollyooly, the Queen of the Slum Fairies.' You sat to him for the pictures of those fairy stories in the *Blue Magazine*? didn't you?"

"Yes, ma'am," said Pollyooly, dropping a curtsy, like the well-mannered child she was.

"Well, I'm the *Esméralda*, the dancer," said the vision, her face all alight with eagerness. "I want a little girl to dance with me in a fairy dance at the Varolium. I've tried at the dancing schools in London without finding the exact right one, then I saw the pictures of you in the *Blue Magazine*, and I was sure that you were just what I wanted, if you could dance a little. I went to Mr Vance, and he gave me your address, and told me that you could dance, because the first time he saw you, you were dancing to a barrel organ."

"Yes, ma'am," said Pollyooly.

"Well, it isn't really dancing I want from you, only just to move about lightly, and be a fairy in the picture; and I'll pay you a pound a

week," said the Esmeralda, with the same eager quickness.

"A pound a week?" said Pollyooly; and her blue eyes opened very wide, shining.

"Yes, and I'll find your dresses—and send you home every night after the show. But perhaps I'd better arrange it with your father and mother," said the Esmeralda, quickly.

"I haven't got any father and mother," said Pollyooly, and her face was aglow with hopes and expectation.

"Then will you come and dance with me?" said the Esmeralda.

"I must ask Mr Ruffin. I'm his housekeeper. He's in, I'll go and ask him now," said Pollyooly.

The Esmeralda smiled a little mischievously.

"I'll come with you. You can introduce me; and I'll arrange it with him," she said confidently, as if she had never had reason to doubt her power of persuading men.

They went to the sitting-room door, Pollyooly knocked at it, opened it, ushered in the Esmeralda, followed her in, and said:

"Please, sir, this is the Esmeralda. And may I go on the stage?"

From the unruffled coolness with which the Honourable John Ruffin rose from his easy chair and bowed to the Esmeralda, the sudden irruption of dazzling visions in scarlet and yellow might

have been the commonest occurrence in his daily round.

He drew forward a chair for her, saying :
 "I'm charmed to make your acquaintance. Like the rest of London, I'm looking forward with the wildest impatience to seeing you dance."

Murmuring a polite hope that he would not be disappointed, the Esmeralda sat down, and said, "I've come about this little——"

He checked the words on her tongue with a wave of his hand turned to Pollyooly, and said in grave tones :

"Did my horrified ears deceive me? or did I hear you ask leave to go on the stage, Mrs Bride?"

"Yes, please, sir," said Pollyooly, firmly.

He shook his head sadly, and said in a reproachful tone :

"Oh, Mrs Bride, Mrs Bride! This must be the result of your country up-bringing. No London child of twelve would dream of going on the stage. This is the pernicious effect of life at Muttie Deeping."

"But it's a pound a week, sir," said Pollyooly, plucking at her frock. "And you told me to make all the money I could, and save all I could, because your creditors might win the victory and consign you to the deepest dungeon in Holloway Castle, and the Lump and I would be turned out. That was what you said, sir."

"A pound a week? That's a very different matter," said the Honourable John Ruffin, with a great air of relief. "As long as it's the honest desire for hard cash, and no silly glamour of the footlights, I see no harm in the stage. But has a London manager offered you an engagement? A gleam of intelligence in a London manager—amazing. It's incredible! Mrs. Bridge, you're pulling the leg of a man old enough to be your uncle."

"It's me," said the Esmeralda, quickly, with a dazzling smile. "I want her to go on the stage."

"Ah, that explains the intelligence," said the Honourable John Ruffin, politely.

"I want her to dance with me—in a fairy pastoral. It will be quite easy," said the Esmeralda.

"Anything with you would be quite easy—mountaineering—deep-sea fishing—writing poetry—the inspiration," said the Honourable John Ruffin, politely. "And if the hours are not such as to spoil her complexion, which would be a crime, and ruin her constitution, which would be a pity, she must certainly accept your offer. A pound a week is certainly fortune; and who knows but what it may lead to fame?" He ended in a tone of enthusiasm.

"I'll look after her," said the Esmeralda.

"I'm sure you will. I already feel that I can

trust her with you." And yet I am not one in whom confidence is easily inspired," said the Honourable John Ruffin. "Bring some fresh tea, please, Pollyooly, and we will discuss the details. Be sure you cut the bread-and-butter very thin."

"No: thick for me, please," said the Esmeralda, quickly. "I've been in South America for months, and there is no bread-and-butter in South America, so I can't get it too thick."

"Good Heavens!" said the Honourable John Ruffin: "do not tell me that there is no grilled bacon there either."

"There certainly isn't," said the Esmeralda.

"What a country!" said the Honourable John Ruffin.

"Oh, it is!" said the Esmeralda, with conviction.

Pollyooly went to make some fresh tea. When she returned, the Esmeralda was saying with her eager animation:

"No, no; the men are worse. The food and the insects were bad enough, but the men were worse—perfectly detestable—horrors."

"How very unfortunate!" said the Honourable John Ruffin, in a tone of profound commiseration. "And I was under the impression that they were charming—full of fire and passion and Southern romance."

"I shouldn't wonder if it was that that made

them so detestable," said the Esmeralda thoughtfully. "It was a perfect persecution."

"I cannot greatly wonder at it," said the Honourable John Ruffin, looking at her with some earnestness.

'Their eyes kept meeting in half-challenging, half-exploring glances. There was a glow in them, as if they had kindled each other.

Over their tea they discussed the matter of Pollyooly's embarkation on a theatrical career. The rehearsals were from eleven to one, and it was arranged that Pollyooly should take the Lamp with her to them, but that at night, during the actual performance, Mrs Brown should take care of him, and that Pollyooly should fetch him on her return from the theatre.

The last detail fixed, the Honourable John Ruffin said, "And so once more, Mrs Bride, you fill a long-felt want. Her capacity for filling long-felt wants is truly wonderful. Mr Vance saw her dancing and knew at once that she was the only child in London he could draw for his fairy tales; you see his drawings and know at once that she is the only child in London who can dance the fairy part with you. Yet neither of you has grasped the great, essential fact of her nature that she can grill bacon better than any one in England."

"It's very nice to be wanted as a model and a dancer, but grilling bacon—" said the Esmeralda;

and she shrugged her shoulders in a way she had acquired in South America in her a very attractive way.

"Ah, you are young—~~young~~. The great things of life have not yet their full attraction for you," said the Honourable John Ruffin in a tone of amiable indulgence.

"Oh—as to being young, I shouldn't think that you were—were much over fifty," said the Esmeralda, and her eyes sparkled.

"Ah, I see that you're a judge of your fellow-creatures. I am not much over fifty. But compared with you and Mrs Bride, I feel a Methusean—that knowledge of the world which comes of sad experience," said the Honourable John Ruffin, with a weary air.

"It must be that which has given you those invisible wrinkles," said the Esmeralda.

"You are right," said the Honourable John Ruffin. "But don't you think that, as Mrs Bride's practical guardian, I ought to come to some of those rehearsals? I feel it a duty—an almost imperative duty."

"The rules are very strict," said the Esmeralda, hesitating a little.

"You'd be surprised how often I come up, against strict rules, and how rarely we agree with one another. One of us generally gets broken before we part," said the Honourable John Ruffin.

sadly. "Still, if you don't forbid me to wrestle with these particular rules, I think I should like to see what stuff they are made of."

"It isn't for me to forbid you—it's the Manager's business," said the Esmeralda, smiling a faintly challenging smile; and she rose.

The Honourable John Ruffin escorted her down to her motor brougham. On his return, smiling amiably, he said to Pollyooly, who was clearing the table, "I have to thank you for a valuable acquaintance, Mrs Bride. I foresee that vast improvement in my work which comes of the proper stimulation."

"Yes, sir," said Pollyooly, in polite assent.

A whirling week followed. There were rehearsals every morning, rehearsals during which Esmeralda bullied or cajoled the band to the highest pitch of excellence; there were visits to the costumier, where Pollyooly was decked out in the most beautiful fairy robes. There were lunches at wonderful restaurants, where she and the Lump ate strange and delicious food. Twice the Honourable John Ruffin came to rehearsals, after brisk but brief struggles with the strict rules, and twice the three of them lunched with him. Pollyooly enjoyed those two lunches very much, though she could not follow much of the talk of the Esmeralda and the Honourable John Ruffin. For the most part, they sparred with one another, lightly; and

it amused her. She was too young to perceive that their eyes did not spar.

The Esmeralda had been right in her choice of Pollyooly; she learned to do all that was required of her in three rehearsals. She had indeed no real dancing to do—it would, of course, have been impossible—she had to move lightly and gracefully about the stage in her part of a decoration, a charming foil to the Esmeralda's dark beauty. On the night of the first performance of *Titania's Awakening*, as the Esmeralda's act was named, Pollyooly was much the less nervous of the two, for she hardly gave a thought to the audience; she was only intent on doing her part properly; and she did her simple business as well as it could be done. She only became really aware of the audience when she stood hand in hand with the Esmeralda, bowing to the storm of applause.

Titania's Awakening was a prodigious success, and Pollyooly found her pound a week assured for many weeks. Once more her bank account would swell. To the two children the Esmeralda was unfailingly delightful; she always hugged them and kissed them at meeting and at parting; she would often spend an hour playing with them in her flat as if she were a child herself. Indeed, time and again Pollyooly felt very strongly that she was really the older and more serious of the two.

Often the Esmeralda talked to the Honourable

John Ruffin about Pollyooly, asserting that she would make an admirable dancer, and that it would be a shame to let her talent be lost for want of the proper training. The Honourable John Ruffin was impressed by her earnestness, and discussed with her at length the matter of the proper training and how it was to be obtained.

At last he said, "Well, it is quite clear that the time has come for the friends of Pollyooly to rally round her—that is the right phrase, 'To rally round her.' A fund must be formed and administered by some serious person—Gedge-Tomkins would be an admirable man to administer it—to pay for her training."

"I must come into that fund," said the Esmeralda, quickly.

"You shall," said the Honourable John Ruffin, smiling.

At first the Esmeralda was very careful to drive Pollyooly back to the Temple immediately after the performance. Then she fell into the way of sometimes taking her with her to supper, for late hours had no effect on Pollyooly. Sometimes one of her admirers had pressed her for an introduction to her angelic foil; sometimes she did not care to sup alone with one of them, and she would say to Pollyooly:

"I want you to come and play little red gooseberry to-night."

At these suppers Pollyooly became acquainted with some of the most ornamental members of the British peerage, men whose ancestors had fought at Agincourt and Flodden, or brewed beer for nearly two generations. She was too young to appreciate her great privilege, and she very much preferred the suppers at which the Honourable John Ruffin (between whom and a peerage stood as many as nine lives) was host, because there was so much more laughter at them.

There are reasons for believing that the Esmeralda preferred them too: if not, why was he her most frequent host? And why did her eyes shine so much more brightly, and her smiles follow one another so much more quickly when she supped with him? Sometimes, too, in her talks with Pollyooly, she showed herself curious about him. It was not much that Pollyooly could tell her, but she seemed quite interested in such little intimate details, as his habit of chanting poetry (Pollyooly believed it to be poetry) in his bath, and of bestrewing his sitting-room with half the garments in his wardrobe in the course of choosing his clothes for the day. Moreover, it was after a talk with Pollyooly about the cold resolution with which he battled with his creditors, that the Esmeralda proclaimed her fancy to sup in a little café in Soho rather than in

the shinier and more expensive restaurants in Piccadilly, and made this their practice.

But one evening he met them at the stage-door of the Varolium, and said, "To-day is my birthday, and to-night we sup at Prince's."

"The Café Grice is very nice, and so cosy," the Esmeralda protested.

"Yes, yes; but a man's birthday fancies are sacred. Nothing must stand in the way of following them. Besides, to-day I had an exceedingly agreeable meeting with my cousin, the Duke of Osterley, a friend of Pollyooly, to whom, indeed, he quite unconsciously stood *in loco parentis* for a while. At least, it was a very agreeable meeting for me, though he went away from it in a state of entirely unreasonable depression, considering his income. And now my pocket is a positive volcano; there is that in it which burns—burns." And he slapped it with the grand air.

"You've touched a duke? How very splendid!" cried the Esmeralda, joyfully. "But if it's your birthday, it's my supper. I shall be hostess, so there!"

The three of them got into her motor-brougham, and all the way to Prince's he and she wrangled amiably about who should be host. In the end the Esmeralda prevailed, and she ordered the supper in a generous, broad-minded fashion, displaying an accurate knowledge of the Honourable

John Ruffin's tastes, which seemed to show that she had paid no little attention to them.

The supper was proceeding joyously when, in the middle of it, there came to the next table a tall, barrel-shaped young man, with an unspeakably terrifying moustache. So fierce and big and bristly was it that at first it absorbed all the attention of the tremulous beholder.

Only when this natural panic had abated could he observe that the young man had cheeks uncommonly like little yellow cushions, thick lips of a scarcely agreeable purplish red, and little black eyes of the best boot-button type. His short-cropped black hair looked a more excellent clothes-brush than ever came out of a factory.

The Esmeralda acknowledged his profound and elaborate bow with the slightest inclination, and a faint look of dismay swept across her face. Pollyooly looked at him at length with fascinated, half-frightened eyes. The Honourable John Ruffin gave him half a glance, and went on talking.

But a cloud seemed to have fallen on the Esmeralda's gaiety; now and again a little frown puckered her brow, and, in spite of herself, her eyes would wander to the remarkable stranger. She seemed to withdraw their gaze from him with a jerk.

Presently the Honourable John Ruffin said, "The yellow gentleman from foreign parts who

keeps staring at you as if he were quite fresh from his simple village, is worrying you. Shall I beg him to confine his sparkling glances to the waiters?"

"No, no!" said the Esmeralda, quickly. "Leave him alone. He's a very dangerous man. He's Diego Perez, the son of a famous Bolivian brigand, and they call him the Prince of Montevideo."

"He looks more like a yellow dog," said the Honourable John Ruffin in a dispassionate tone, surveying him coldly.

The South American twisted his fierce moustache, scowled at the Honourable John Ruffin, and again turned his passionate gaze on the Esmeralda.

"He was an awful nuisance out there," she said, frowning. "He must have been dreadfully spoilt when he was young."

"He'll get dreadfully spoilt now that he's old, if he goes on staring like that," said the Honourable John Ruffin, grimly, "Though it would need painstaking work to spoil a face like that."

"Oh, no, no! You must leave him alone—you must, really," said the Esmeralda. "He's really very dangerous. The people out there were terrified of him. They said he would stick at nothing."

"A chip of the old brigand block, eh?" said the Honourable John Ruffin, calmly. "But we

must remember that the lion of Montevideo is the lamb of Piccadilly."

"But he carries weapons—a revolver. They all do," said the Esmeralda.

"Nature gave me all the weapons I need for dealing with South American princes," said the Honourable John Ruffin, calmly. "But, after all, we're not yellow dog-fanciers. Let us talk about more interesting things—the art of grilling bacon, now."

Pollyooly did not understand their talk very clearly, but she gathered that her friends did not like the big, yellow gentleman with the splendid diamond in his shirt-front; therefore, loyally, she took a strong dislike to him herself.

The next time his eyes fell on her, observing that her companions were absorbed in one another, she made a most hideous face at him. He started, drew himself upright in his chair, and scowled at her.

Pollyooly did not abate her hideous grimace, and, with an air of dignity, he withdrew his eyes from her. But, owing to defective training in his youth, his was such an unbalanced nature that he could not keep them off her; they were dragged back to her by his unhealthy curiosity to see what dreadful shape her exquisite features had assumed. Consequently she enjoyed the rest of that supper very much. Whenever the yellow

gentleman's boot-button eyes strayed to their table, she was ready for him with some fresh grimace, suggested by a truly fertile fancy.

He was bitterly annoyed to find himself no longer able to impress the Esmeralda with the fiery glances of passion; he felt that the need to see what new distortion of her angel face Pollyooly had ready for him weakened his power of concentrating himself in a burning gaze, and so impaired its intensity.

At the end of twenty minutes of it he gave it up, rose with a jerk from his chair, and strode out of the restaurant, in a petulant fury.

"I congratulate you, Pollyooly—a very valuable accomplishment," said the Honourable John Ruffin, smiling.

Pollyooly flushed in a lively dismay. She had never perceived that the Honourable John Ruffin had brought to perfection the admirable art of seeming to see nothing while seeing everything.

"What has she been doing?" said the Esmeralda, smiling at her.

"Pollyooly has routed your yellow pet," said the Honourable John Ruffin.

"How clever of you! How ever did you do it?" cried the Esmeralda.

"By the intensity of her forbidding gaze," said the Honourable John Ruffin.

It soon grew plain that Diego Perez had come

to England in pursuit of the Esmeralda, and he became her yellow shadow. He took up his abode at the Savoy, and she hardly ever came out of her rooms without finding him, bowing and smiling with a conquering air, somewhere on her path to the street.

He was always at the stage-door to greet her as she came out after her performance. Did she lunch or dine at a restaurant, he sat gazing at her in his passionate way. Every day he sent her flowers—to her rooms and to the theatre; sometimes there was a bracelet or a ring with the flowers; always there was a note, ill-spelled, perhaps, but very passionate.

Sometimes among the passion was an invitation to lunch or dinner; sometimes an invitation to accompany the adoring writer to a warmer climate and dwell in a palace. Whenever it was his good fortune to get a few words with the object of this passionate adoration, he would prefer this petition orally, and ever with a firmer persistence; twice he talked of procuring a marriage license against her succumbing to his yellow charm.

The Esmeralda was an icicle to him. She returned his flowers, his jewellery, and his notes. She broke away from him in the middle of his passionate protestations. At restaurants she tried not to give him a glance; sometimes she succeeded.

But there was no discouraging him; he was plainly under the deepest-rooted conviction that a woman must succumb to a series of attacks.

His perseverance was not without its effect. It compelled the Esmeralda to be always talking of him—to Pollyooly and to other admirers, who could not long remain ignorant of that yellow, passionate presence. But to the Honourable John Ruffin she said nothing about him save when his adoring presence at the same restaurant drew their talk to him. Then she made light of the matter, laughed at it. She was greatly afraid lest the Honourable John Ruffin should intervene, and she dreaded the South American's violent temper. Then there came a lapse from her caution.

"It's really getting awful!" she cried to the Honourable John Ruffin, when her large round admirer made his first appearance in the little Soho café, for it was so unexpected that it took her off her guard.

"If he goes on sticking to it like this, you'll have to marry him to get rid of him," said the Honourable John Ruffin.

"I wouldn't marry him for one of his silly palaces in every country in the world!" cried the Esmeralda. "Why, he'd probably murder me out of jealousy before we'd been married a

week. "Look how he scowls when he sees me with you—with anybody."

"Yes; I've noticed that the presence of Pollyooly affects him painfully," said the Honourable John Ruffin, pensively. "And those scowls do belie that tender heart of his about which he writes to you."

"It's all very well to laugh," said the Esmeralda, unhappily, "but I'm getting more and more uneasy about him. He won't go on in this peaceful way much longer—I know he won't. I've heard stories about him. You don't know what Montevideo is."

Her tone grew more and more anxious; she looked almost scared.

"My dear child, I'd no notion that the brute was worrying you like this," said the Honourable John Ruffin, with a sudden earnestness; and he regarded the Esmeralda with a sudden, tender concern. "Why, I'd have stopped it at once. But it seemed just a joke to me. I'll stop it tomorrow."

"There! I've done it now! And I did so mean to say nothing!" cried the Esmeralda in the liveliest dismay. "It isn't really anything. It's just my silliness. He doesn't really bother me at all. You mustn't take any notice of him. He doesn't matter at all."

"I'll bring you his yellow head on a charger

for breakfast—no, for lunch to-morrow,” said the Honourable John Ruffin, calmly. “It will make a pretty table decoration, and it will go admirably with one of those, yellow, or perhaps orange, dresses, which you alone of all women in this drab world can properly wear.”

He spoke gently enough, but there was an undertone of resolve in his tone which promised ill to Señor Perez.

“No! . No! I won’t have it! I won’t have you interfere at all! It isn’t myself at all! It’s his doing something horrid to *you* I’m afraid of!” cried the Esmeralda, in a panic.

“Oh, come; we’re in London—in the Twentieth Century—not in Montevideo in the Nineteenth,” said the Honourable John Ruffin, in a reassuring tone.

“If you have a row with him, I’ll never speak to you again! Never!” cried the Esmeralda in acute anxiety.

“It is my duty as a plain Englishman to bring you the head of that yellow dog on a charger—a charger of Sheffield plate, I think, for I cannot run to gold; and my duty I must do,” said the Honourable John Ruffin.

“No, no, John, you mustn’t interfere with him. You mustn’t really,” said the Esmeralda, in a pleading tone; and she leaned forward with her hands clasped.

"But I don't want you to *eat* his head—it would be impossible indeed to make a brain sauce to go with it, owing to his unfortunate and disgraceful lack of brains. I only want you to have it as a table decoration," protested the Honourable John Ruffin, earnestly. "I want to lay it on your lunch-table as a tribute to your all-conquering charm. It's a tribute paid to so few women in this milk and watery age. You'd feel immensely proud."

"Oh, there's no doing anything with you!" said the Esmeralda in a tone of despair, and she rose. "But come along. We won't talk about it here. You'll never promise with his ugly face in front of you."

"Women certainly have a wonderful intuition," said the Honourable John Ruffin, regarding the face of Señor Perez with the most critical attention as he rose. "Perhaps it would be more pleasant to take Mrs Boide, who can hardly keep her eyes open, back to the Temple and finish our supper at the Savoy. It's only eleven."

He smiled graciously at the scowling Montevidean, and they distinctly heard that yellow one's fine teeth grind in his purple mouth.

They conveyed the sleepy Pollyooly to the bottom of Alsatis, and waited till she came down it bearing the sleeping Lump. Such was his splendid placidity that it was seldom indeed that

the transit from Mrs Brown's to his own bed awoke him. Then they walked down to the Thames Embankment, and along it to the Savoy. . .

The next morning at breakfast the Honourable John Ruffin said very sadly, "Have you ever observed, Mrs Bride, how terrible a thing it is to have a soft heart? But probably you haven't got one, for it is not a feminine attribute. But for a man it is terrible; it robs him of the most thrilling joys of life."

"Yes, sir," said Pollyooly, sympathetically.

"Now you saw last night that I had promised myself the pleasure of continuing the work of the parents of the Lion of Montevideo by spoiling him a little more. I was going to spoil his face. Was it not plain—not the face, but my intention?"

"Yes, sir," said Pollyooly, with conviction.

"Well, my soft heart has, as usual, robbed me of a joy; and I have pledged myself to leave his parent's work unfinished."

"Yes, sir," said Pollyooly, and she looked a little disappointed.

"And now, of course, I am in a hole. The offensive ruffian must be checked; and I can't do it. The only form of remonstrance that sort of bounder understands is the remonstrance by boot and I can't remonstrate with him now," he went on, talking to himself, and frowning.

"He does bother the Esmeralda, sir," said Pollyooly.

"Yes; I expect you know ever so much more about it than I do," said the Honourable John Ruffin, and he frowned again. "Of course the boot for our purpose is the boot of Mr Gedge-Tomkins. But I'm hanged if I can see how to bring it to the application point."

"No, sir. I don't think he'd do it, sir," said Pollyooly.

"He wouldn't," said the Honourable John Ruffin with decision. "He is so much fonder of his career than I am of mine. And there might be a fuss."

He was silent, with puckered brow, cudgelling his brain.

"Please, sir, Mr Vance is very big," said Pollyooly gently.

"By Jove! Genius! Genius again!" cried the Honourable John Ruffin, loudly and joyfully. "Oh, how I envy you your resourceful mind, Mrs Bride! Vance is the very man; he boils with chivalry! The thing is done! I will bring him and the Esmeralda together again—at tea—this very afternoon! Splendid!"

He wasted no time. Directly after breakfast he betook himself as fast as a swift new taxi-cab could bear him to Chelsea, to Hilary Vance's studio, and found him regarding his brushes with

the gloomy dislike of a man who is about to get to congenial work. He asked him if he remembered the Esmeralda, the charming creature who had called on him to ask for the address of Pollyooly.

Remember her? . . . Hilary Vance protested that he did nothing but remember her! . . . He dreamt of her! . . . He had been to see her dance fourteen times! . . . It was the desire of his heart to paint her! . . . It would mean undying fame! . . . She would be the inspiration of a lifetime!

The Honourable John Ruffin let him talk about her. He talked about her himself. And then he insinuated, into his discourse deftly and without emphasis, the story of her impassioned persecution by the Lion of Montevideo.

Hilary Vance flamed and flared. His chief desire seemed to be to know whether the Honourable John Ruffin called himself a man. He reiterated the question till the Honourable John Ruffin lost count of the reiterations. When lack of breath reduced the chivalrous artist to a passing silence, he explained that his hands were tied. Forthwith Hilary Vance sprang into the breach. He would free the Esmeralda from the persecution at once—that very afternoon. He demanded to be led to the Lion of Montevideo without a moment's delay.

"There is a season for everything, and the evening is the time for Montevideans," said the Honourable John Ruffin, calmly. "I don't know how it strikes you, but I always associate the Lion of Montevideo with the fountains in Trafalgar Square—it must be the lions at the foot of Nelson's column. In my dreams I see him in the basin of the left-hand fountain—I do not know why the left-hand fountain—sprawling."

"Splendid!" said Hilary Vance, in a tone of rich enthusiasm.

"As a matter of fact, I have often wondered what those fountains were for," said the Honourable John Ruffin, thoughtfully. "Now I know."

"You do have good ideas. You're rather like me," said Hilary Vance.

The Honourable John Ruffin looked at him earnestly, then he said, "Yes; but we are nothing to Mrs Bride."

"Ah, that child's a wonder," said Hilary Vance, with appreciation.

"Well, will you come to tea this afternoon and meet the Esmeralda? Then we can arrange to do everything in our power to wash the Lion of Montevideo," said the Honourable John Ruffin, in a businesslike tone. "He must be lured to the bath."

"I shall be charmed—delighted," said Hilary Vance, with even warmer enthusiasm. "I'll bring

James with me, if I may. I think he had better be with me at the fountain. He keeps so cool."

"Bring him by all means," said the Honourable John Ruffin. "The meeting with the Esmeralda will make him enthusiastic too, and when it comes to bathing the Lion, he will have all his coolness about him." " " "

Hilary Vance and Mr James came to tea, and the Esmeralda set their patriotic detestation of the foreigner burning furiously. She was always charming, but to friends of the Honourable John Ruffin she was charming indeed. . . .

After she had gone, the three men arranged the details of the bath of Señor Pérez. They did not take Pollyooly into their confidence, for they did not wish the Esmeralda to know of their cooling plan. " " "

When, with Pollyooly, she came out of the stage door of the Varolium, she found the Honourable John Ruffin awaiting her. Señor Pérez did not appear till they had walked several yards down the street, and then, as was sometimes his curious way, he appeared suddenly ten yards behind them, and proceeded to follow them with the purpose of supping at the same restaurant, and pouring broadside after broadside of passionate glances into the Esmeralda. There can be no reasonable doubt that he believed that he shone in the part of the basilisk. It may be that he had found the attitude

of that intent, but probably mythical, beast prove effective with the ladies of his native land.

The Esmeralda kept casting uneasy glances over her shoulder, for she really feared that he might dash upon the Honourable John Ruffin, knife in hand (a Montevideo custom, according to the manager who had arranged her triumphs in that country), and she wished to be ready to throw herself between them. It was only natural that she should desire to adapt her conduct as far as possible to the dramatic tradition.

The Honourable John Ruffin talked carelessly, as if he were unaware of his rival's nearness, though once, with a quick glance, he measured the distance which separated that rival from the two trusty friends who followed him. Hilary Vance almost transpontine in his stealthy gait. Pollyooly walked sedately beside the Honourable John Ruffin; only once, when he was talking in an animated fashion to the Esmeralda, did she turn in the full light of a street-lamp and bestow a hideous grimace on their follower.

The Esmeralda, dearly as she would have loved to be safe in a taxi-cab, accepted the Honourable John Ruffin's suggestion that they should stroll back to the Savoy, since the night was hot, and the Strand still empty, for the crowds had not yet poured forth from the theatres.

In this order they came into Trafalgar Square,

Señor Perez, a menacing figure, stalking them grimly, never dreaming that he in his turn was being stalked by a fiery artist.

It must have been some inborn instinct for the tragic event which caused Pollyooly to lag behind, and she was not more than five yards away from them when, a few feet from the fountain, Hilary Vance tapped Señor Perez on the shoulder, and in the hissing tones of melodrama, informed him that the time had come for an infernal foreigner to cease persecuting an English star.

With infinite swiftness and presence of mind Señor Perez smacked Hilary Vance's face. With a roar Hilary Vance closed with him, and rapt him from the earth, or rather, to be exact, from the pavement, in his mighty arms. At the roar the Esmeralda turned, but the Honourable John Ruffin's arm went round her, and he drew her quickly across the square.

Hilary Vance with long strides bore Señor Perez, struggling violently and expostulating in shrieks of the most idiomatic Montevidean, to the basin of the fountain. Then it would have been both more fitting and more decorous that he should have dropped him into it without falling into it himself, but that was not how it happened. They both fell into the basin together with a magnificent splash—so glorious a splash that Pollyooly shrieked with joy.

Once in it, they did not arise swiftly, for they were entangled with one another. They floundered well out towards the middle of the basin before they disentangled themselves, rose, and came floundering towards its rim. Mr James frankly sat down on the cold pavement to laugh in greater comfort; Pollyooly danced lightly in her childish glee.

The Honourable John Ruffin had halted his wondering charge in the shadow of one of the Nelson's lions and, laughing joyfully, surveyed the dim leviathans in the fountain.

"What is it? What's happening?" cried the Esmeralda.

"Nothing,—nothing," said the Honourable John Ruffin, in reassuring, but shaken, tones. "It's only Mr Vance collecting materials for his great historical picture of the Lion of Montevideo taking his evening bath."

"You're a perfect terror, John!" said the Esmeralda, in a tone of profound conviction. "It's your doing this! I'm sure of it!"

"The Ruffins have always been patrons of the arts. And I do what I can—the family tradition, you know," he said with amiable self-congratulation.

"But it will make him more dangerous than ever," said the Esmeralda, in a tone of extreme disquiet.

"Not a bit of it. It will cool his ardour—so

don't you worry about it, my dear child," he said firmly, and kissed her.

The dripping bathers climbed stiffly over the fountain's rim, Hilary Vance explaining in a roar that, if Señor Perez continued to annoy the Esmeralda, this evening bath would become his nightly practice, Señor Perez threatening Hilary Vance in a scream with assassination, the duel, and the Law.

It was the keen eye of Mr James which marked the policeman arriving in tardy haste. He shoved Hilary Vance's hat into his hand, and cried, "Bolt man! Bolt! Off you go, Pollyooly!"

Hilary Vance left the square in immense bounds; Pollyooly ran lightly towards the other corner, Señor Perez turned on Mr James and threatened him. He was being very shrill and idiomatic in broken English and Montevidean when the eager policeman arrived.

"'ere! Wot's ah this about?" said the policeman.

Señor Perez was chiefly pantomimic, for he was almost past the point of articulate speech.

The policeman listened to his husky Montevidean execrations attentively. Then he turned to Mr James, and said, "Look 'ere, wot's it all about?"

"You'd better ask another policeman," said Mr James, calmly. "I was walking across the square ;

and I saw this gentleman in the fountain, taking a bath. I think he's a foreigner."

"'e's a forriner all right," said the policeman with decision. "But there was another of 'em. I sor 'im."

"Yes; there was a curly-headed man in the fountain too—anotter foreigner to judge from his curly hair," said the deceitful Mr. James, carelessly. "Besides, Englishmen bathe in the morning—at home."

The policeman surveyed the gasping Montevidean with a gloomy frown, then he said, "'ere, you come along er me an' give a hexplanation of yourself."

Señor Pérez said something in Montevidean.

"You—come—along—er—me," said the policeman, raising his voice to make his meaning plain.

Señor Pérez got a little breath, and pointing to Mr. James and then to the fountain was again shrill in Montevidean.

"He was trying to explain things to me when you came. Can you make out what he's driving at? Does he want me to take a bath too?" said Mr. James, coolly.

"It looks like it," said the policeman; then even more loudly he said, "You—come—along—er—me."

Señor Pérez gibbered.

The policeman took him by the arm: Señor.

Perez promptly closed with him in a damping wrestle. The policeman blew his whistle; Mr James walked quietly but quickly to the south-western corner of the Square. There he turned and looked back for a moment at the wavering group by the left-hand fountain; then he went down Pall Mall.

At the first sight of the hasting policeman the Honourable John Ruffin drew the Esmeralda along towards the Strand. Pollyooly caught them up as they entered it. They had never seen her so animated, or with such a fine colour in her cheeks.

"It was lovely!" she said breathlessly. "They *did* splash and grunt!"

She was still smiling a happy, angel smile when they reached the Temple.

The next morning the Honourable John Ruffin made a point of attending Señor Perez' first public appearance in England—at the Police Court. He found him very hazy, so did the interpreter, the magistrate, and the evening papers. It may be that the police had confused his wits; it may have been the cold water—but his immersion in the left-hand fountain in Trafalgar Square remained a mystery.

The Honourable John Ruffin thought that the chastened Montevidean remained obscure in his account of his ducking from a desire that it should not be generally known that he had been per-

secuting the Esmeralda. Plainly he was a wiser man than he had supposed. Perhaps, like a social reformer, he had acquired wisdom in Trafalgar Square.

They saw him no more; his ardour had been thoroughly damped, and the cloud lifted from the Esmeralda's light spirits. It did not fall on them again till the last week of her engagement at the Varolium. From it she was going to Berlin, from Berlin to Petersbourg, from Petersbourg to Rome, and from Rome to Australia.

During that last week both she and the Honourable John Ruffin were much quieter as they supped together after the theatre than they had used to be; their eyes lingered on one another, in clinging glances. Pollyooly observed their fallen spirits with sympathy; she was sorrowful herself at the coming departure of the Esmeralda. But she took it as a matter of course that the Esmeralda must go, that their work must sunder them. Life was like that. It is to be doubted that either the Esmeralda or the Honourable John Ruffin took their approaching severance in as resigned a spirit.

The Esmeralda had not abandoned her plan that Pollyooly should learn to become a dancer, and many were the discussions the friends of Pollyooly held about the matter. The Honourable John Ruffin made prevail his idea that a fund

should be established from which to pay her teachers, and slowly he brought it about that each of them should fix his yearly subscription to it at the lowest he could afford, in order that the collector of the fund need be under no scruples about harrying it out of him, and might have the less trouble in doing so. His suggestion that he should try to get Mr Gedge-Tomkins to become the collector of the fund was welcomed by all of them. If one of them were collector, it was conceivable that he would find coolnesses arising between himself and those who proved tardy payers. None of them admitted the possibility of tardy payment, they were all too enthusiastic about promoting a great Art and Pollyoly. Yet they perceived clearly that the Honourable John Ruffin had good reason in his suggestion.

When, therefore, all their subscriptions had been fixed, he went one morning after breakfast to Mr Gedge-Tomkins and found him in the middle of his soothing morning pipe.

He bade him good morning in a very brisk and businesslike tone, and said, "Some friends of Mary Bride have decided that she is to adopt the career of dancing—stage-dancing."

"Stage-dancing—that child?" said Mr Gedge-Tomkins, in a tone of great surprise. Then he frowned severely, and added, "Why not let her stay in her proper station? She makes a very

fair laundress, and she is earning very good wages for a child of her age—very good indeed.”

“Well, we don’t feel that the station of Temple laundress is the right station for an angel child. We feel that providence called her to it as a stepping-stone to higher things, to this art in fact,” said the Honourable John Ruffin, firmly.

Mr Gedge-Tomkins grunted dissent.

“Besides, you have to bear in mind that Mary Bride has very good blood in her veins. There can be no doubt that she is a red Deeping,” said the Honourable John Ruffin, with a very serious gravity.

“What’s that?” said Mr Gedge-Tomkins, quickly.

“Haven’t you ever heard of the Norfolk Deepings?” said the Honourable John Ruffin, allowing a little contempt for the social ignorance of his colleague at the Bar to steal into his tone.

“Of course—of course,” said Mr Gedge-Tomkins, hastily, but quite untruthfully.

“Well, the red Deepings are the oldest and strongest strain of the Norfolk Deepings. Red Roger, in fact, was the big man of the family,” said the Honourable John Ruffin, in the tone of a historian.

“Of course, of course,” said Mr Gedge-Tomkins, to whom it was the newest of news.

Well, quite by accident we found out that

Mary Bride is a red Deeping, an undoubted descendant of that romantic old scoundrel Red Roger. The Duchess of Osterley herself made the discovery."

"Did she indeed?" said Mr Gedge-Tomkins, deeply impressed.

"She did; and you see it makes a lot of difference. It explains Pollyooly; and it makes it imperative on her friends to see that she does not spend all her days as a Temple laundress."

"There's certainly something in that," said Mr Gedge-Tomkins, with genuine conviction.

"Well, we're going to cultivate her talent for dancing since, as things go nowadays, it is a career most likely to afford her an opportunity of marrying into the sphere to which, by blood, she belongs."

"I see the idea. Of course the Aristocracy is marrying the dramatic profession at a great rate," said Mr Gedge-Tomkins, thoughtfully.

"Well, we have formed a fund for the training of Mary Bride in this art, and we want someone to manage the fund for us and collect it. I suggested that you would do it better than any of us, for you have more strength of character than any of us, and a much greater knowledge of business."

"M'm," said Mr Gedge-Tomkins, doubtfully.

"Of course it won't be an easy job. I am one of the subscribers, and another is the artist to whom Pollyooly sat for the illustrations to the fairy stories in the *Blue Magazine*. But that makes you all the more the right man to manage the fund. If it were an easy job, I wouldn't ask you."

"I must think it over," said Mr Gedge-Tomkins, properly flattered and properly unconscious of the fact. "If I don't undertake to manage the fund, I'll subscribe to it. She's certainly a remarkable child, and it would be money well spent."

He had only just had it brought home to him that Pollyooly was a remarkable child, but now he saw it very clearly indeed.

"Good," said the Honourable John Ruffin, going towards the door.

"By the way, I don't think she ought to be called Pollyooly any longer—now that you've found out that she's a red Deeping," said Mr. Gedge-Tomkins, with conviction.

"Oh, while she's young—even red Deepings should be kept young," said the Honourable John Ruffin, as he went out of the room.

That afternoon the Esmeralda took Pollyooly to her own mistress, the dancing-mistress who had guided her own early steps, introduced her with a strong assurance that she had found for

her a most promising pupil, and arranged for her first lessons.

The next morning Mr Gedge-Tomkins' treated Pollyooly with a new respect; and on the way to the Law Courts he told the Honourable John Ruffin that he would undertake the management and collection of the fund for her training in her art. He then went on to warn him that if he once grew interested in the matter, he would assuredly exact the last farthing of their subscriptions from the subscribers, so they had better make up their minds to it.

"That's what I want," said the Honourable John Ruffin, with decision.

The Esmeralda was pleased indeed to have arranged a future for Pollyooly, before she departed on her continental and Australian tours, and told her many times that she looked to find her on the way to excellence when she returned. Pollyooly promised her that she would do her best. At the last performance of *Titania's Awakening* they received an ovation which made the management of the Varolium sorry indeed that they had not engaged the Esmeralda for another six weeks; such popularity was independent of times and the season.

Pollyooly was sad when they came out of the theatre for the last time; and in spite of their best efforts to be light-hearted, their last supper

with the Honourable John Ruffin was a somewhat mournful meal.

The next morning they saw the Esmeralda off from Charing Cross Station. It was not a scene for sad farewells; some fifty of the Esmeralda's friends and admirers were there, resolved to make her departure a triumph. The Esmeralda seconded their enthusiastic effort nobly, but her smiles were a little strained, and she had only eyes for the Honourable John Ruffin. Pollyooly was the last person she kissed; his was the last hand she clasped.

He and Pollyooly came gloomily out of the station together and turned down the Strand. Pollyooly's eyes were still a little misty; and his face was so deeply overcast that, without thinking what she was doing she slipped a comforting little hand into his.

He looked down at her with mournful eyes, squeezed it, and said sadly, "Ships that pass in the night, Pollyooly—ships that pass in the night."

CHAPTER IX.

THE DUKE'S MISTAKE

AFTER the going of the *Esmeralda*, the world ceased to whirl for Pollyooly; its pace slackened; it grew quiet, and save for an altercation now and again with one of the more aggressive creditors of the Honourable John Ruffin, altercations which left the face of the creditor far more brightly red than that of Pollyooly, humdrum. Indeed, of that whirling world into which that delightful dancer had led her, there only remained some fairy robes, some pretty-silk-lined boxes which had held chocolates, and four thin gold bangles which had come with moving, but ill-spelled, epistles from young, but lavishly tipped, adorers of the ruling class.

Pollyooly's regret for the whirling world was neither deep nor lasting. Very soon she went about her work, tended the Lump, played with him, and took him for his airings quite contented and unrepining. To all seeming, life presented itself dimly to her sage mind as something in the nature of a kaleidoscope; and you acquiesced in its changes. Sometimes the squares fell into a

bright picture, sometimes into a dull one. You took them as they came, and that was all there was to it. That, at any rate, was the impression the Honourable John Ruffin derived from her answers to the questions he put to her twice or thrice when a curiosity came on him to discover what lay behind that serene angel mask.

He expressed his impression in the pregnant words, "Mrs Bridg, you are a philosopher."

Hilary Vance, Mr James, and Madam Pichve, her dancing-mistress, sometimes saw another Pollyooly. She devoted herself to her dancing in the careful, painstaking fashion in which she grilled the bacon of the Honourable John Ruffin, or tended the Lump. But it was a very different matter; she loved it. Sometimes to dance was something very like an intoxication to her. Once every week she took the Lump to tea with Hilary Vance and Mr James at the studio in Chelsea, and always she danced for them that they might see what progress in the art she was making.

Hilary Vance, watching her dancing with the genuine artist's eye for form, would presently begin to mutter and ruffle his mop of curls. Sometimes he would cry, "Oh, what a poor thing the pencil is! Never—no, never shall I be able to get into a drawing the whole of the motion in one of Pollyooly's movements once she has warmed up to her dancing."

"If you could get the whole of Pollyooly dancing, you would set down, plain for all who have eyes to see, the secret of the Dionysiac ecstasy," said Mr James one day. "Pollyooly is the Mænad. When she warms to her dancing, I see the Bacchic frenzy rise. But I—I am a wise man; I know that manufacturers do not make the paper on which either pencil or pen can set down these things."

About a month, or perhaps it was five weeks, after the going of the Esmeralda, Pollyooly had just finished dusting the bedroom of the Honourable John Ruffin, one morning, when there came a knocking on the door of his chambers.

She went to it as she was, duster in hand, the sleeves of her print frock rolled up to her elbows, and opened it.

There at the threshold stood Lord Ronald Ricksborough, very elegant and fashionable in his Eton jacket, white waistcoat, and light trousers. His very shiny top hat was pushed on to the back of his head, for the morning was hot, and the four flights of stairs consequently mountainous.

"Why—why, it's Ronald!" cried Pollyooly, and her clear, pale cheeks flushed scarlet, and her eyes shone on him with more than the radiance of sapphires.

"By Jove! It's Mary!" cried Ronald, and

his dark eyes brightened with an equal pleasure.

They shook hands, and Pollyooly led the way into the sitting-room, where, at the sight of a stranger, the Lump rose from the floor and gazed at Ronald with solemn eyes.

"It's my little brother, Roger. But everybody calls him ~~the~~ Lump," said Pollyooly, by way of explanation and introduction.

"Goodness! He is red-headed. His hair is redder than your's," said Ronald, with the frankness of the astonished.

"He is a cherub—a genuine cherub—everybody says so," said Pollyooly, quickly, and with decision.

"Ah, yes," said Ronald, a little vaguely.

He turned to her, and they looked at one another with eyes full of interest and pleasure. Then, as he took in the duster, the print frock, and rolled-up sleeves, Ronald's face fell a little, and he said, "What are you doing here—in my cousin's chambers?"

"We live here—the Lump and me," said Pollyooly, her grammar weakened by this sudden pleasure.

"Yes. But what do you do? Are you—are you John Ruffin's servant?" said Ronald, with some hesitation, and a touch of anxiety in his tone.

"I'm his housekeeper; it's a position of dignity,

he often says so," said Pollyooly, with an air of great dignity herself.

"Oh, I see," said Ronald, with some relief.

"Is the Court just as nice as it was in May? And the dogs? And has anyone else but you found out that I wasn't Marion? And have they found her?" said Pollyooly quickly, almost in a breath, in her eagerness to learn all that had happened since her flight.

"The Court's all right," said Ronald, sitting down in an easy-chair. "It's jolly enough, though not so jolly as when you were there to knock about with. And the dogs are all right. There's two new ones—not up to much. And nobody has ever guessed you weren't Marion. I told you they wouldn't; you're much too much like her—on the outside. And they haven't found her, and they're not likely to. They didn't begin hunting for her till you bolted from the Court, and, of course, she'd really been lost a fortnight then."

"Did they bother you much about me? Where I'd got to?"

"Well, that was quite simple. We never thought of it; but, of course, they kept asking where Marion was; and, of course, I didn't know, so it was quite easy to say I didn't. I could tell the truth all the time," said Ronald, in a tone of satisfaction.

"Of course they would. That was nice," said Pollyooly

"It was rather a blessing. They can't catch you out in the truth," said Ronald.

"And how's Miss Marlow?" said Pollyooly, with more politeness than interest.

"Oh, she's still there—waiting for Marion to come back. But they'll never find her now," said Ronald.

"I don't think they will," said Pollyooly.

They were silent for a minute, gazing at one another with pleased eyes.

Then Pollyooly sighed and said, "I do wish I was going to the Court again—with the Lump."

"I wish you were," said Ronald. "It would be ripping. You're the only girl I ever came across one could be really pals with. And then, of course, you were in the great mystery. It was awful luck for a girl." He ended with a faint sigh of envy.

"I didn't care much for the mystery myself," said Pollyooly, thoughtfully. "I was so afraid of getting found out. But I did like being at the Court."

"We did have a good time. But the mystery was the thing," said Ronald.

They paused to gaze at one another again with pleased eyes. Then Pollyooly asked him what he had been doing since they parted, and he told her of the term at school, his riding, fishing, birds'-nesting, and adventures on his wanderings with

the dogs at Ricksborough Court, and Pollyoo'y's many questions lengthened it out.

"When he came to the end of it she sighed and said, "Oh, I do wish I had been there."

"I wish you had," said Ronald, with fervour.

"But, I say, this is a very jolly morning. Couldn't you put on some clothes and come out? The Park isn't up to much; but it's better than nothing at all."

Pollyooly's eyes shone, but she said, "I can't leave the Lump."

"Bring him along; he won't howl, I suppose?"

"He never howls," said Pollyooly, quickly.

"Right O; hurry up," said Ronald.

Pollyooly was not long dressing herself and the Lump. She put on her blue silk frock, because her golden frock was very like the amber frock she had worn at Ricksborough Court; and Ronald had seen her in that. She dressed the Lump in his blue silk tunic, because it matched her frock.

Ronald looked at her a little anxiously as she came into the room, but at the sight of the Liberty confection which so admirably adorned her angelic beauty, his face cleared, and he said, "By Jove! you do look all right!"

Pollyooly smiled the gracious smile of one who has received a tribute known to be deserved.

They sallied forth from the Temple into Fleet Street, and found it very like an oven.

“We’d better take a taxi to the Park,” said Ronald.

“What for?” cried Pollyooly, aghast at the extravagance. “There’s lots of motorbuses, and they’ll take us there just as quick. It’s no use spending money on taxis when there are so much nicer things to spend it on.”

“But I’ve lots of money. My grandmother gave me a five-pound note last night, and I only changed it this morning,” Ronald protested.

“The thing to do is to save money, not to spend it,” said Pollyooly, with a solemn severity born of lessons in the school of necessity. “But if you do spend it, it’s silly not to spend it on really useful or nice things.”

“All right, we’ll go on a bus,” said Ronald, yielding to this cogent reasoning.

When they had settled themselves on the top of a motorbus, the Lump in Pollyooly’s lap, she said: “What did your grandmother give you the five-pound note for?”

“A tip,” said Ronald.

“Yes, but what did you do for it?”

“Nothing. It was a tip.”

“But what have you got to buy with it?” said Pollyooly, puzzled.

“Anything I like,” said Ronald.

“Not clothes, or boots, or things like that?” said Pollyooly, knitting her brow in her perplexity.

"No; I can spend it just as I like—on tuck, theatres, cricket-bats—anything," said Ronald.

"Well, that is funny. Nobody ever gives me money unless I do something for it," said Pollyooly.

"That's because you haven't any relations," said Ronald.

"Oh, of course, Aunt Harinah sometimes gave me a penny—but five pounds all at once; it's wonderful!" said Pollyooly in a tone of awe.

"Oh, I get a fiver quite often. It's all luck," said Ronald.

At the corner of Bond Street they descended from the bus, and Ronald ushered them into a confectioner's shop. The entry of an angel child and an authentic, but red-headed cherub, under the escort of such a good-looking boy as Ronald, aroused an uncommon interest amidst the lunchers from the Kensingtons, of which the children were quite unaware, for they devoted themselves to the sweets and cakes with a whole-hearted intentness, Pollyooly watching over the Lump with her usual motherly care.

When, judging by his own feelings, Ronald believed that they could hold no more, they took another bus to Hyde Park Corner, and from there betook themselves to the banks of the Serpentine. They sat for half-an-hour in pleasant somnolence.

talking but little; then their natural activity asserted itself again, and they went for a row.

At a quarter-past three Pollyooly said that she must be going back to the Temple to get the Honourable John Ruffin's tea ready against his return at four o'clock. Ronald escorted them back to the gate of the Temple, and on the way he invited Pollyooly to lunch with him on the morrow, and afterwards go with him to the Varolium, if she could find someone to take care of the Lump, since the entertainment would be above the head of a child of three. She said that she could leave the Lump in the care of Mrs Brown, and if Mr Ruffin would give her leave she would like to come very much. But she must ask him.

Accordingly, when she took the Honourable John Ruffin's tea into his sitting-room, she said:

"Please, sir, Ronald—Lord Ronald Ricksborough, I mean,—has been here."

"The deuce he has!" cried the Honourable John Ruffin. "And what did he say when he saw you?"

"He seemed pleased, sir. You see, we got to know one another very well at the Court," said Pollyooly, in an explanatory tone.

"I've no doubt he was pleased—the pleasing sight gives pleasure to the ingenuous boy, as his

Latin exercise book doubtless assures him. I expect he was surprised too."

"Yes, sir. We went to the Park," said Pollyooly.

The Honourable John Ruffin raised his hands with an air of the liveliest surprise, and cried, "We live indeed in a precocious age. I did not expect to be confronted by the question of followers for years and years. Oh, Pollyooly, Pollypoly, what is your sex coming to?"

"I don't know, sir," said Pollyooly, gravely.

"And in your case the question of followers is a difficult one. If I had not decided that since you resided here you were my housekeeper, and must be called Mrs Bride, it would be quite easy. But I do not know what the rules about a housekeeper's followers are. They may be allowed in the house."

"Yes, sir," said Pollyooly.

"You see it's a very important matter; it must be put on a proper footing. It would never do to have any laxness in it, for we might run counter to the established tradition which would be horrible. Besides, one's own of a noble family is sure to lead to others."

"Yes, sir," said Pollyooly. "Can I go with him to the Varolium to-morrow afternoon, sir?"

"That's awkward. Suppose you were mistaken

for Lady Marion Deeping?" said the Honourable John Ruffin, doubtfully. "Of course, you danced there. But that was very different; no one would ever dream that Lady Marion Ricksborough would be on the Varolium stage. But they would be quick enough to recognise her in the auditorium—with her cousin too."

Pollyooly's face fell.

"Well, that can't be helped. It wouldn't be fair that you should be deprived of the simple pleasures of London, because you once helped to restore a daughter to her mother," the Honourable John Ruffin went on in a lighter tone. "And, after all, I should think that Ronald could stand cross-examination very well. If there is trouble, tell him to refer all inquirers to me."

"Yes, sir," said Pollyooly, and her face grew bright again.

"And I tell you what, if anyone persists that you are Lady Marion, and wants to carry you off to Ricksborough House, you be firm with them; just call a policeman and give them in charge. You'll like doing that."

"Yes, sir." They wouldn't have any right to, sir," said Pollyooly.

"None whatever. So mind you're firm with them."

"Yes, sir," said Pollyooly, in a tone of determination, and at the joyful thought of the morrow

she went up to her attic, to fetch the Lump, on very light feet.

When Ronald arrived at one o'clock next day, he found her ready to go, with him, the Lump already in the safe keeping of Mrs. Brown. He smiled at her with a great contentment, for she was looking her most angelic; and on their way down the stairs he put his arm round her clumsily and kissed her.

Pollyooly flushed a little, but returned his kiss frankly; then she said, "It's funny. But I don't often get kissed except by the Lump."

"I don't care about kissing myself—much. In fact, I hate having women globbering over me," said Ronald, frankly. "But, somehow, you're different," he added thoughtfully.

"I like it rather," said Pollyooly. "Aunt Hannah used to kiss me, of course, but she's dead. And the Esmeralda used to kiss me when I was dancing with her, but she's gone to Paris and Berlin."

"The Esmeralda! You danced with the Esmeralda?" cried Ronald, in the liveliest amazement, and he stopped short on the stairs.

"Yes, at the Varolium; and I got a pound a week for six weeks.. It's saved—in the Post-Office Savings Bank," said Pollyooly, with natural pride.

"You were that kid! The fairy, in *Titania's*

Awakening! Why, I've heard no end about you! Half a dozen of the fellows talked of nothing else for days after the mid-term holiday. Lascelles minor went to see you four times, and Carruthers minor three, and they wrote to you."

"I wonder if they sent me any of these bangles," said Pollyooly, jingling them on her wrists. "But I got such a lot of things—boxes of chocolates, you know. And I got the letters and the names mixed up, so I don't know who sent me different things. The Esmeralda told me not to write and thank them, or I should have nothing else to do."

"I call it rather cheek, their sending you bangles—chocolate is all right," said Ronald, with a touch of jealousy in his tone.

"Oh, people always do, when you dance," said Pollyooly, carelessly.

They went on down the stairs, and suddenly Ronald laughed joyfully, and said in a tone of triumph, "By Jove! I wonder what they'll say when they hear that I know you, and we've been going about together!" He kissed her again in the fulness of his heart. "Fancy your not telling me that sooner! Most girls would have told me first thing."

"We were talking about you and the Court all yesterday," said Pollyooly, simply. "But when I grow up, I am going to be a dancer like the Esmeralda myself. I'm working hard at it."

"That's ripping," said Ronald, in a tone of the warmest approval.

But he could not properly discuss a matter of such weight while he was in motion, and at the bottom of the stairs he came to a standstill, and gazed at her earnestly.

"So you've really been on the stage?" he said, knitting his brows into a thoughtful frown. "I tell you what, ever since you were at the Court I've been thinking that you're the kind of girl I should like to marry. In fact, you're the only girl I ever felt like that about. But when I found you were John Ruffin's housekeeper, I was a good deal put off——"

"It's a position of dignity. He said so," Pollyooly interrupted in a very firm tone.

"Yes, but fellows don't marry housekeepers. But if you're going on the stage—dancing, too—that makes it all right. Lots of fellows marry girls on the stage—in the choruses, of musical comedy——"

"They can't dance for nuts," interrupted Pollyooly, mindful of the Esmeralda's strictures on that deserving but incompetent class.

"I dare say not, but they're on the stage, so fellows can marry them. And I can marry you if you're going on the stage. Don't you see?" said Ronald, eagerly.

"Yes," said Pollyooly, gravely.

"You're sure you don't mind?" said Ronald, a little anxiously.

"No: I should like it," said Pollyooly with her angel smile.

"Then we might as well be regularly engaged."

"All right," said Pollyooly, in a pleased tone.

"But, of course, we won't get married till you've been on the stage for a bit—just to make it quite right," he said with a thoughtful caution.

"But I've been on the stage," said Pollyooly.

"Yes; of course you have. But we shan't be able to get married for a good many years; and I think you'd better go on it a bit more before we get married. It mightn't count properly, your being so young."

"All right. I should like it," said Pollyooly. "People take you to supper at beautiful restaurants."

Ronald breathed the sigh of relief of a man who has arranged an important matter satisfactorily, and said:

"Well, we'd better get on, or we shan't have proper time for lunch."

They walked briskly out of the Temple, and climbed on to a motorbus. When they had settled down in their seats, Ronald chuckled, and said, "By Jove! the fellows will be sick when they hear we're engaged. It's something like a score, besides being jolly itself."

Then he turned a little gloomy, and said, "But

we ought to have taken a taxi. I don't believe Lascelles minor would let the girl he was engaged to go on a bus."

"I shouldn't have thought he was engaged, if he wrote letters to me," said Pollyooly, in some surprise.

"Now I come to think of it he isn't," said Ronald.

"Then, how does he know what he'd do?" said Pollyooly, triumphantly.

Ronald's face cleared.

After some discussion about where they should lunch, they decided, at Pollyooly's suggestion, to go to the Café Grice in Soho, where the Esmeralda had been used to sup with the Honourable John Ruffin. She said that the French pastry there was delicious. There Ronald enjoyed another surprise. When they entered, the proprietor and his staff leapt forward to a man to greet Pollyooly, their faces wreathed in smiles of welcome. The proprietor himself took Ronald's orders with a great air of deference, and Ronald found the attention very much to his liking.

They ate some *poulet en casserole*, and the rest was pastry and ices.

Ronald was surprised by the bill, but he said nothing till they came out. Then he said, "By Jove! That's an awfully good place for the money. I must go there when I'm lunching in

town on my own. I shall be rather short, you know, when I've bought you a decent engagement ring."

"A ring? Oh, I *shall* like having it!" said Pollyooly, flushing, with shining eyes. "Wearing a ring will make me always remember you."

"I expect that's what they're for," said Ronald.

They walked quickly to the Varolium, and when they came into its glittering vestibule Ronald was making for the Box Office when Pollyooly checked him.

"I mustn't be paid for," she said firmly. "When you're on the stage you don't pay for seats. The Esmeralda told me so. It wouldn't be right."

She crossed the vestibule to the Manager, and held out her hand. The Manager greeted her with a warmth as deep, though not so effusive, as that of the proprietor of the Café Grice. He asked her news of the Esmeralda, and since the Honourable John Ruffin had read her parts of the Esmeralda's letters to him, she was able to give him the latest account of her triumph in Berlin. She told him, with a natural pride, that she had not found in Germany a little girl who suited her nearly as well as she had done, and the Manager said that she might very well hunt the world through without finding one. She introduced Ronald to him, and, after the interchange of the due civilities, he himself conducted them to a box.

in the middle tier. Again Ronald found the attention very much to his liking.

They enjoyed the entertainment greatly. Pollyooly watched the dancing with the keenest eyes, and discussed it very gravely indeed. After the entertainment they walked down Piccadilly, discussing the different turns, to the Bond Street confectioner's. There they made an excellent tea.

They were strolling back down Piccadilly, still talking earnestly, when a motor-car drew up at the kerb, with a jerk, ten feet before them, and the Duke of Osterley sprang out of it.

He caught Pollyooly by the arm, crying triumphantly, "Marion at last! Where did you find her?"

"I'm not Marion!" cried the startled Pollyooly, trying to tug her arm away.

"That isn't Marion, sir," cried Ronald.

"Not Marion? What you do mean? What are you talking about?" cried the Duke.

"She's Mary Bride," said Ronald.

"Yes, I'm Mary Bride. Let go my arm!" said Pollyooly, tugging harder.

"Do you two impudent young devils think don't know my own daughter?" cried the Duke and his prim face began to redden with anger.

"I'm not your daughter!" cried Pollyooly.

"Indeed, she isn't, uncle. She's Mary Bride—John Ruffin's housekeeper," Ronald protested.

- “Let go my arm, or I’ll call a policeman,” cried Pollyooly, fiercely, mindful of the Honourable John Ruffin’s instructions.
- Already a large group was regarding with interest the dapper but purple gentleman squabbling with two elaborately dressed children in the middle of Piccadilly, and, keenly alive to the risk of seeing his domestic affairs once more in print, the Duke picked Pollyooly up bodily and stepped into the car with her. Ronald sprang in after him, and the Duke cried, “Home!”

During the four minutes that it took them to reach Ricksborough House the Duke said nothing, and Pollyooly said nothing. He scowled at Pollyooly, and pulled at his neat and harmless moustache; Pollyooly gave him scowl for scowl. Ronald, to whom the occurrence was an extremely agreeable ending to an agreeable afternoon, twice assured the incredulous Duke that he was making a mistake.

- When the car stopped, the Duke hurried Pollyooly into the house, through the hall, calling to the interested, but impassive, butler to send Mrs Hutton to him at once, and into the dining-room.

“Now what do you mean by this cock-and-bull story?” he said with all the truculence he could muster.

“It isn’t a cock-and-bull story—it isn’t really. It’s the literal truth. She isn’t Marion at all—

She's Mary Bride—John Ruffin's housekeeper. She has been for months," said Ronald.

"Yes; that's who I am, and I've got a little brother called Roger—so there!" said Pollyooly, with a truculence that more than matched the Duke's.

"Yes; she has. I've seen him," said Ronald. "I went to the Temple to see John Ruffin, and I found her there, and she's so like Marion I asked her to come out with me. And she's been on the stage, which Marion couldn't have done, because she's too much of a duffer—dancing with the Esmeralda at the Varolium. Hundreds of people can tell you so."

The Duke was staggered. The attitudes and firmness of the two children shook his conviction that his daughter Marion, whom, after all, he only knew by sight, was before him.

Then Mrs Hutton bustled into the room, in a panting and purple excitement, and, at the sight of Pollyooly, cried fussily, "Why, if it isn't her ladyship come back! Oh, if your ladyship only knew the trouble and anxiety you've given everybody, especially your good father——"

"He's not my father! I haven't got a father!" cried Pollyooly, interrupting her.

"That settles it. Mrs Hutton recognised you at once," said the Duke, triumphantly. "I knew I couldn't be mistaken."

"She's a silly old idiot!" said Pollyooly, fiercely, but with intense conviction.

"But it is a mistake, uncle. Can't you see how much better looking and intelligent Mary is than Marion?" Ronald protested earnestly, with more regard for the truth than for a father's pride.

"Both of them say that this isn't Marion, that it's another little girl, Mrs Hutton," said the Duke, shaken again.

"There can't be two Lady Marions, your Grace," said Mrs Hutton, in a tone of finality.

"Of course there can't," said the Duke.

As he spoke, Ronald's fox terrier, Wiggs, trotted into the room, and with no hesitation whatever greeted Pollyooly with every demonstration of affectionate regard.

"That does settle it," said the Duke, in a tone of mingled relief and triumph. "That dog couldn't know you if you weren't Marion. Take her to her room, Mrs Hutton, and lock her in it. Pack her things and take her down to the Court by the 10.15 to-morrow. If she gets away from you again, I shall discharge you."

"I won't go!" said Pollyooly, firmly; and she sat down in an easy-chair.

The exasperated Duke sprang forward, caught her by her arm, and jerked her to her feet. Mindful of the teaching of the Honourable John Ruffin, Pollyooly uttered a shrill and piercing scream.

The startled Duke loosed her arm and stepped back. "Oh! I see what it is," he said, grinding his teeth. "Your mother has put you up to this."

"My mother's been dead years and years. You leave me alone," said Pollyooly, firmly; and she sat down again.

"Take her upstairs, Mrs Hutton," said the Duke, thickly.

"If she touches me I'll bite her," said Pollyooly, in a tone of the firmest resolution.

The Duke scratched his head, and said, "Look here, if you don't go with Mrs Hutton, Jenkins shall take you, you naughty child."

"If he touches me, I'll bite *him*," said Pollyooly, undauntedly.

The Duke panted and rang the bell.

The portly butler came to the summons.

"Take Lady Marion to her rooms, Jenkins," said the Duke.

"If you touch me, I'll bite you," said Pollyooly, glowering at him and baring her teeth.

Jenkins scratched his head.

"D'you hear what I say? Take her to her room!" cried the Duke, furiously; and he executed a short, poor dance on the hearthrug.

Jenkins advanced slowly, looking unhappy.

"Look here, you go quietly. You'll only get hurt and get your clothes torn," said Ronald, in a

tone of decision. "And I'll go and fetch John Ruffin. He'll make them understand."

The thought of getting her clothes torn hampered Pollyooly's freedom of action; and, scowling at Jenkins and the Duke, she said, "All right; if you'll fetch him, I'll go quietly." And she rose with a most ungracious air.

Ronald bolted out of the room and the house. Pollyooly followed Mrs Hutton upstairs, closely guarded behind by the relieved Jenkins. They conducted her to a large and airy bedroom, with a pleasing view over the Green Park, but they did not lock her in because, with a forethought admirable in one so young, she contrived to reach the door of it just before Mrs Hutton, and sequestered the key. This compelled that stout Argus, to sit on a chair against the door, and Pollyooly, admiring the view, paid little heed to her repinings.

Meanwhile, the Duke went to his smoking-room and sat down in an easy-chair to recover from the perturbation occasioned by the conduct of Pollyooly, still haunted by a certain dread, aroused by the steadfast attitude of the two children, that he had imprisoned a perfect, but red-haired stranger. As he sat soothing himself and pulling nervously at his unhappy moustache, he pondered gloomily over his quarrel with the Duchess, which, beginning as a most trivial molehill, had swelled to such mountainous proportions.

Then Ronald arrived with the Honourable John Ruffin, whom by the luckiest chance he had actually found in his chambers.

The grave and gloomy air with which the Honourable John Ruffin entered the smoking-room, was, to an observant person, utterly belied by the sparkle in his eyes, which showed him simmering with quiet joy.

"To say nothing of an assault, an action for malicious imprisonment will certainly lie," he said in a gloomy tone, without any phrase of greeting to the Duke.

"Look here; you're not in this cock-and-bull story, too, Ruffin?" said the Duke, anxiously, rising hastily as he spoke.

"You forget yourself, Osterley. I shouldn't dream of being in any cock-and-bull story," said the Honourable John Ruffin, with a most dignified air. "I'm talking about my unfortunate house-keeper, whom you have abused, assaulted, and maliciously imprisoned. Really, Osterley, if your peerage were five centuries older, I could have understood it. I should simply say that the old robber baron strain had suddenly broken out in you. But you were ordinary London burgesses till the middle of the seventeenth century. You have no excuse for behaving like this. It's uppishness—mere uppishness."

"Oh, stop your confounded rotting!" said the

Duke, irritably. "Do you mean to tell me that that red-haired child is not Marion? Why, Mrs Hutton, Marion's maid, recognised her at once, and what's more, Ronald's dog, Wiggs, recognised her too. I'll swear he did."

"Old women and dogs! Do you mind my feeling your ducal skull, Osterley? You must be suffering from softening of the brain. The child is my housekeeper, Mary Bride. She has been about the Temple for the last two years; and scores of people can swear that she was at Muttie Deeping for ten years before that," said the Honourable John Ruffin, in incisive tones.

"If I could only be sure that Caroline had not put you all up to this game!" said the Duke, dismally.

"Look here; do you think I'd have Marion as my housekeeper?" said the Honourable John Ruffin, with some heat. "Do you think Marion could grill bacon so that a self-respecting human being could eat it?"

"She might have been taught," said the Duke. "Taught! Taught!" cried the Honourable John Ruffin. "Oh, this is a father's fond partiality! I did not expect to find it in a man of the world like you, Osterley. You must know that the power of grilling bacon is a heaven-sent gift. It *can't* be learnt."

"But how do you explain that dog?" said the Duke, obstinately.

The Honourable John Ruffin could very well have explained that Wiggs had made the acquaintance of Pollyooly when she was impersonating Marion at Ricksborough Court. Instead of doing so, he cried indignantly, "I don't explain dogs; I explain the law. I'm a barrister, not a biologist, — as you very well know, if you will only stop to think. But I'll tell you what we'll do; we'll all go down to the kitchen, and Pollyooly—Mary Bride—shall grill you some bacon. That will quite convince you."

"I've no great fancy for bacon at six o'clock in the day," said the Duke, gloomily. "I suppose I've made a mistake."

"You have—a bad mistake—and with a red Deeping, too. You know what the red Deepings are."

"A red Deeping?" said the Duke.

"Of course Pollyooly is a red Deeping. That's why she's so like Marion. I told you she came from Mittle Deeping; and you know how these old strains crop up among the village folk. Has she bitten anybody?" said the Honourable John Ruffin, with a sudden air of anxiety.

"She said she was going to bite Jenkins—wish she had," said the Duke, gloomily. "But she hadn't when she went upstairs."

"That's all right," said the Honourable John Ruffin, with an air of relief. "If a red Deeping bit me, I should have the bite cauterised at once. But never mind. I'll soothe her. Send for her."

The Duke rang the bell, and bade Jenkins fetch Pollyooly. She came into the room, looking like an aggrieved but very defiant angel. At the sight of the Honourable John Ruffin her face cleared. She crossed the room swiftly, and took her stand at his side. Then she scowled at the Duke.

The Duke cleared his throat, and, with an air of deep discomfort, said, "I—er—er—find I've made er—er—a mistake. It er—er—seems you aren't Marion after all."

"I told you so, and you wouldn't believe me. And so did Ronald," said Pollyooly, in a tone of triumph.

"It was er—er—the likeness. You're very like my little girl," said the Duke, in the unhappiest tone.

"Only more intelligent-looking—Ronald says so," said Pollyooly, firmly.

"Perhaps—perhaps. And then the clothes you're wearing; and then er—er—finding you with my nephew—"

"I asked her to come out because she's so like Marion," Ronald interposed quickly.

"We seem somehow or other to be drifting away from the subject of compensation," said the

Honourable John Ruffin, in his most agreeable tone.

"Ah, yes; 'compensation,'" said the Duke, with a fresh air of gloom. "I suppose a couple of sovereigns——"

"My dear Osterley—assault, abuse, and malicious imprisonment," said the Honourable John Ruffin, in a tone of protest.

"Well, five pounds," said the Duke, more gloomily.

Pollyooly puckered her brow thoughtfully: "I think it ought to be six," she said firmly.

"All right—six," said the Duke with tears in his voice.

He drew a note-case from his pocket, took a five-pound note from it, drew a handful of money from his trouser pocket, chose a thin-looking sovereign from it, and gave them to Pollyooly. She thanked him politely but without undue warmth.

Everyone but the Duke looked relieved and pleased.

Then Ronald said, "May I have the car and take Mary home, uncle?"

The Duke growled an assent, and Pollyooly dropped a curtsey and bade him good evening like the well-mannered child she was.

In the car Ronald said, "By Jove! he was fun!—You did stand up to them; and John

Ruffin did pull uncle's leg. He's a fair knock-out John Ruffin is. I'd no idea. And you have all that money—six quid! What are you going to do with it!”

“Save it,” said Pollyooly.

“It seems funny to save money,” said Ronald.

“Yes; but when Mr Ruffin's creditors are victorious, and consign him to the deepest dungeon in Holloway Castle—he says they may—then the Lump and I will live on the money I've saved, and we shan't go to the workhouse,” said Pollyooly, in the tone of a conqueror of Fate.

“Oh, it's like that—I see,” said Ronald.

He kept the cab in King's Bench Walk, while he went round with her to Mrs Brown's to fetch the Lump; and he carried him up the stairs to the Honourable John Ruffin's chambers.

Then he put his arm round her neck and kissed her, and said, “I'll come round for you to-morrow about one, and I'll bring that engagement ring.”

“Oh, it will be nice!” said Pollyooly; and she kissed him.

